

Scripture Reading: Genesis 41:

“Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. 2 Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. 3 Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river. 4 And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. 5 He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. 6 Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. 7 And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, it was a dream. 8 Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, & he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt & all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. 9 Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: “I remember my faults this day. 10 When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, 11 we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. 12 Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. 13 And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him.” 14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.” 16 So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.””

"Dreams in the Bible"

Last week, we ended with what the chief butler recalls near the end of our text this morning: Genesis 40: “21 Then [the king] restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand. 22 But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

Joseph was forgotten and left in prison and now our text begins with the transition to a new phase of life for Joseph there in Egypt... “Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river.”

Two long years have passed since the cupbearer to the King was restored to his place of honor and now God will bring Joseph to the attention of both his forgotten cell-mate and the King!

In the past two weeks we have learned lessons about how God blesses us in our vocations and how God takes history where He wants it to go and to focus on those I kept asking us to not get ahead of ourselves in the story because it is one that we know well. Now as we move on in this Book of Beginnings we can let go and begin to see and understand the BIG picture. Joseph the servant of God is about to be lifted up, and of course it should remind us about our Savior who was lifted up, both in death on the cross & unto Glory!

- Joseph has been abused by his brothers and cast aside by Potiphar, and was now forgotten in prison for two more years.
- But the time has come for God to give him the position and honor Joseph had seen in the dreams he had back with his family.

The means that God will use to accomplish this are again dreams, the dreams of the King that we read in our text. Now these dreams will be repeated as the King relates them to Joseph so I am not going to spend much time on the details this morning, but wanted to use this opportunity to speak a bit about dreams in the Scriptures, focusing on two very important ones that relate to the work of Jesus directly.

Our subconscious dreams are a natural part of our life, and most believe that it is very healthy for us to dream. We will also see that we can have a conscious dream about our future!

- Some remember sub-conscious dreams vividly & others seem to forget them even before they awaken.
- In life we see some following their dreams faithfully and others who seem to just drift aimlessly.

As we see here in Genesis, God has often used dreams to accomplish His purposes and to reveal future events.

- First we had two dreams given to Joseph so he would know that he would one day be a leader.
- Then two dreams given in the prison so the cupbearer would know that Joseph could interpret dreams
- And finally two dreams given to the King to confound his wise men and finally to convince him that those predictions of the future had to be taken very seriously.

Here and in many other places God is using our dreams to communicate something important and they should impact how we move forward in life.

And we also see God using regular dreams to guide his disciples in the New Testament as well, when you have Peter dreaming not twice but three times about the unclean animals coming down in sheets or when Paul saw the man from Macedonia calling out to him in his dream.

The Spirit of God chose to reveal many of these dreams in the Scriptures & in establishing the authority of the Apostles and laying the foundation of the Church, the Body of Christ!

- So while we must take very seriously the dreams and visions that God used and recorded for us in the Scriptures, we must be careful not to look for such things as the norm in our Christian lives today.

God is not going to reveal in dreams or a vision what job you should have, or how big your house should be, or even where it should be! God expects us to use the wisdom and knowledge given to us in His Word and the fellowship of the Saints in the Body of Christ to properly discern the right answers to such questions.

- With that said, I am sure God can use our subconscious to some extent just as He does our conscious thinking in helping us understand the right paths to walk.

The danger is when we move from, “I think God is leading me here or there,” with a plan that is clearly in line with Biblical wisdom; to “God told me such and such or God showed me such and such,” with no real grounding in the Word. The various “visions” that have been a part of our current elections would be a great example of the later... But perhaps a good example of the former can be found in the midst of the very familiar sermon that Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost... What we might want to consider as New Covenant Dreams!

So the Spirit has come just as Jesus promised and the people gathered in Jerusalem are amazed and many think the Apostles are just drunk...

Acts 2: “14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.

18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. 21 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.”

The coming of Jesus has changed the world, the old orders are passing away and the Day of the Lord has arrived. We touched on some of the dreams and visions that we see in the New Testament and we know that the Word of God was completed as the Nation of Israel and the great Gentile Empires were judged, but do the sons and daughters stop dreaming when this is all done?

- I want to strongly argue this morning that we must NOT!

Now by this I do not mean that we are to have continuing revelation from God or new visions about where God is going to take history, but rather a great confidence about what has been revealed so that we become great dreamers! What do I mean by that? Well think of the example of Joseph...

I would call Joseph a great dreamer, not because he continued to have dreams like those given when he was very young, but because he believed what God had revealed through them to him, and in a very Biblical sense dreamed about his future...

- This gave him the strength and wisdom he needed to serve God well in some very difficult situations and prevented him from becoming bitter even in the midst of great injustice and disappointment.

Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul emphasized that the history of these Old Testament Saints was given for our benefit, pointing us to Jesus and His saving work and so in a very real sense their dreams are our dreams. Yes we will see the dreams of Joseph fulfilled in his lifetime as he goes on to rule Egypt, but it points us to the greater Joseph who becomes the Lord of Lords over all the nations of the earth and that truth should guide and direct our lives and actions today!

In his later dream, Peter learned a tough lesson for a Jew of his day about bringing down the wall of division they had erected between themselves and the Gentiles and while we see that fulfilled in his ministry it continues to convict and inspire all of us today as we strive for unity in the Church.

- So yes, we are to be great dreamers and visionaries and we need to remember how important that is to our children and their children!

If we don't inspire them with the right dreams, the world is ready and willing to do so with the wrong dreams and one or the other will have a great impact...

- William Wilberforce had a dream about ending the slave trade and reforming the manners of England and his efforts changed the whole world!

Perhaps the most famous dream of our day was one preached by a young black minister on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963... For good or ill his words & dreams remain with us today.

So as we think about becoming great Christian dreamers in our time, I want to take this opportunity to turn to one of the most famous dreams in all of the Bible which sadly in our day has been largely ignored or relegated to some future time so that it cannot bring the inspiration I believe it should bring to every generation in the Church! Just we see in the life of Joseph, in the time of the exile, God again used a young Jewish man to interpret a powerful dream given to a very powerful pagan leader...

King Nebuchadnezzar is haunted by a dream and he is even tougher on his wise men than Pharaoh was, because he wants them to first tell him the dream and then the interpretation. They tell him this is impossible and he simply says do it or you all die.

When Daniel hears of this, he asked the King to give him some time, and appeals to his Jewish friends to pray so “that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret.”

After this the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision and he then first gives glory to God.

19: “So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said:

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. 21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. 22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.

23 “I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king’s demand.”

- So Daniel arranges an audience with the King and the King very directly asks if Daniel can do what was asked of the wise men...
- Daniel says these men cannot give the answer and tells the king:

28 “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these:...”

- Now if you think we should relate the later days here with Peter’s statement at Pentecost, you are correct! So yes this dream & it’s interpretation has a direct impact on our lives & should cause us to be great dreamers today!

31 “You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. 32 This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

- It should be easy to see why this dream troubled the King and since he was pondering what the future held, we can also understand why he wanted the one who put forward an interpretation to first give him an account of the dream...
- With Daniel having done so, the King would have great confidence in the interpretation given:

36 “This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all— you are this head of gold. 39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. 41 Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay...” 44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

Now if we think back to the story of Joseph, when the King's dreams are interpreted next week we will see Joseph and the King taking decisive actions based on what was revealed.

- In the same way, if this King's dream is certain & its interpretation sure, it should lead to some very decisive actions on our part!

Daniel clearly tells the King that this statue represents four mighty Gentile Empires starting with his own in Babylon as the head of Gold. Then comes the Persian Empire as the chest of silver, the Greeks under Alexander the Great as thighs of bronze and finally Rome as the legs of iron, which was a divided Kingdom by the time of Jesus.

- And of course, Jesus is the stone cut without hands, the Savior of the World who came to establish His Kingdom and to bind Satan so he could no longer deceive the nations.

The nations of the world would now belong to Jesus just as Psalm 2 or Psalm 110 clearly teach us! Something the example of Joseph now blessing the nation of Egypt foretold. When we see the coming of Jesus in this light, when we read the Great Commission with this understanding, then we can become the great dreamers that Peter envisioned us being on that Day of Pentecost! Knowing that the King's dream is certain the interpretation is sure should give us great confidence about doing our part to believe & to carry out the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His disciples:

Matthew 28: "18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

The Apostle Paul lays this grand vision before us in the glorious chapter about the resurrection where we read:

I Corinthians 15: "20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

- May we be those who dream about such things coming to pass, and may we be ones who act on those dreams day after day, knowing & believing that the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the whole earth!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 93

"The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved. 2 Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting. 3 The floods have lifted up, O Lord, The floods have lifted up their voice; The floods lift up their waves. 4 The Lord on high is mightier Than the noise of many waters, Than the mighty waves of the sea. 5 Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever."