

GOD WILL TELL YOU THE MEANING

Genesis 41: 1-16 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This week I read about a man who was drafted into the armed forces. Wherever he went, he would stoop to pick up any piece of paper which was on the ground. And every time he picked up a piece of paper, he would look at it, shake his head no, and then throw it away. It didn't take too long for his superiors to become aware of his actions and to try to determine to find out the underlying cause. Finally, in desperation, they decided to grant him a medical discharge. The soldier was summoned to his superior's office and handed an official form which granted his medical release with an honorable discharge from the service. Looking carefully at it, the soldier exclaimed, "This is it! This is what I've been looking for."

What was Joseph looking for in prison? Remember, Joseph was only 17 years old, when betrayed by his brothers, he was sold into slavery. In Egypt, Joseph soon was working for Potiphar, a high official serving Pharaoh. Things seemed to be wonderful for Joseph, as the Lord blessed him and he found favor in Potiphar's sight. Potiphar placed Joseph in charge of running his huge household. But this all came to a sudden full stop, when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and she failed in her attempt. Then to protect herself, the wife of Potiphar falsely accused Joseph of attempting to sexually assault her. Potiphar promptly threw the book at Joseph and threw him into the Egyptian prison.

Despite desperate circumstances, God stood beside Joseph. Soon, Joseph was placed in charge of all the other prisoners. In prison, Joseph met Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, who committed an offense against Pharaoh, that angered him which landed them both in prison. They had dreams which Joseph interpreted, telling the baker that in three days he would be executed, but that the cupbearer would be released from prison in three days, and reinstated to his post. All Joseph asked the cupbearer to do was --- "Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house." (Genesis 40: 14) But the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph. After two whole years, nothing yet was said to Pharaoh. The cupbearer totally forgot him.

As we explore this day when Joseph finally started to see a light at the end of his dark long tunnel in prison, there are some lessons for us, beloved, that we all need to learn, some hard lessons that we may not want to learn. What are these three hard lessons that we must learn if God is to ever exalt us in His kingdom?

GOD OFTEN USES WHAT SEEM LIKE IMPOSSIBLE DELAYS TO PERFECT HIS WILL IN US AND TO FULFILL HIS DREAMS IN US. (I.)

Go back to the last verse of Genesis 40: 23 and read it. "Yet the chief cupbearer

did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. Now look at our text in Genesis 41: 1. Only God could tell Pharaoh the meaning through His humble servant, Joseph. “After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed” what seemed like an impossible dream. After years in prison, Joseph had had some small ray of hope that the cupbearer would remember him. Those two years must have been extremely difficult for Joseph. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into month. Soon it was clear to Joseph that he was totally forgotten in his chains. The cupbearer apparently was never going to remember him. When Joseph was 17 years old, and sold into Egypt by his brothers, it was around 1729 BC. Now it was about 1716 BC. Years had passed and Joseph had faced false charges, false imprisonment, and now false promises. We have no written clues as to how Joseph coped with this long delay in God fulfilling his dreams. Did Joseph ever despair or wrestle with depression? Did he ever sense God had abandoned him? We have no biblical evidence that Joseph blamed God for allowing all his misfortunes and his imprisonment. Whatever Joseph faced during these long delays, he came out unscathed, without blaming God, but rather full of faith and confidence in God.

Now God who used dreams in the life of Joseph, then the baker and the cupbearer, decided to give Pharaoh two impossible to interpret dreams. What Joseph was doing those days in prison we don't know, except we know he was ruling in prison for the keeper of the prison, he was the under-keeper. What were the chances for Joseph to be getting out of prison finally? The odds were less than one in a billion. Now think with me of what the odds are for you in the circumstances you face. What are the chances God will come through for you? Do you even remember the dream God gave you years ago, that unpopular dream, that you have laid to rest? Maybe it wasn't even a dream you liked, but you knew it was from God. Perhaps, like Joseph, you told it a few times, until you knew, that if you knew what was good for you, you'd forget the dream as if it never came. What are the odds that God still remembers what he told you, years ago in that dream—calling you to Himself in a closer way, calling you to a ministry for Him, or calling you closer in disciple-ship to Him, or calling you to surrender to Him in a manner you or others you love, parents, spouse, children, or mentors didn't believe in. When you see no light at the end of the tunnel, does it do any good to keep recalling such a dream?

How many of you openly or secretly gamble? Some Christians believe it is sin, and they refrain from gambling. Others go to Vegas with a prescribed amount of money to put in slot machines, and they play the games, but only use that \$25.00 or \$50.00 that they brought. Some people, even some professing believers, gamble secretly, unbeknown to their spouse. How many of us play the odds? When the National Lottery was launched back in 1994, their slogan was, ‘It Could Be You’. The chance of matching all six numbers and winning the National Lottery is 1 in 14 million. That means, if you played the National Lottery every week, you could

only expect to win a jackpot if you lived to be 300,000 years old. Compare the odds of winning the lottery to other things: There is 1 in 3,000 chances of each of us being struck by lightning in our lifetime. There is a 1 in 10,000 chances of being injured by sitting down in your bathroom. There is 1 in 3.7 million chances of any person being killed by a shark. There are 1 in 3,000 to the 250,000th power chances to be struck by an asteroid or comet. Despite the impossible odds, millions of people play the lottery, they dream of what they will do with their money when they win, and the difference it will make in their lives when they suddenly come into this untold wealth. Now, from a worldly point of view, Joseph would have had a better chance of winning the lottery than of getting out of that Egyptian prison. Yet in the face of impossible odds, Joseph kept holding on to God's promises, God's dreams, and God's faithfulness.

A few days ago, I probably cast my fishing line down at the Gorge over 300 times before I got my first strike. It was a beautiful big rainbow. Two strikes and two fish later, at dark, Jinny and I headed for home with some great fish meals ahead to enjoy. I tried four lures before I found one that was taken. That lure worked twice. I love to fish, but it's no gamble. It's fishing. It's calculating, thinking, scheming, trying to decide what the fish will want. Waiting in the dark for God to act, waiting during delays for Him to keep His promises, to fulfill a God-given dream, or to turn an impossible situation around—that's not gambling and it's not fishing. It's waiting for the Lord. Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3: 25, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." For a while, Joseph was probably waiting on the cupbearer, but the cupbearer had forgotten all about him. Now we see that the forgetting of us by one sinful person, or by one godly person is part of the providence and sovereignty of God. Had the cupbearer remembered Joseph right away, Joseph might have ventured back home to his Dad's home, in Paddan-aram, or Beersheba. But God doesn't play the odds. He isn't a gambler and He doesn't have to fish for answers. He makes everything beautiful in His time. (Eccl. 3: 11) The cupbearer's forgetfulness was overseen and part of God's time-table. It was essential for Joseph not only be released from prison, but also, immediately, to be brought into the presence of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

There are few, if any of us here today who haven't lived enduring God's allowed delays. And there are few of us who will not face more delays in the future—delays that God allows in His providence and sovereignty. I know what I am preaching is not popular, but it's biblically true. Your unpleasant situation right now, your loneliness, your trying job, your tragic separation from someone you love, your unemployment, your indebtedness, that closed door, your childlessness, your delays in finding a suitable treatment for physical health to return—all these delays, like prison walls, feel like they are closing in on us. In our delays, God

wants us to cast our cares on Him. At any time, God could have sent those two wild dreams to Pharaoh, that were too hard for his magicians to interpret, but God waited for two years, and He gave Joseph no reason for His delay. All Joseph could do is all we can do—and that is to walk by faith. Joseph now at age 30 years of age, had to wait in a hard delay for God to exalt him to the heights of Egypt for the rest of his long life.

After a failed attempt at suicide, John Newton's close friend, William Cowper wrote a mighty hymn in 1774, "God Moves in A Mysterious Way." Here are those mighty, but brief six verses. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill He treasures up His bright designs And works His sovereign will. You fearful saints, fresh courage, take; the clouds you so much dread Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain. Learn this hard lesson—God often uses what seems like impossible delays to perfect His will in us and to fulfill His dreams in us. Yet in all our delays, let God be the one to tell you the meaning of them. He is the interpreter. Secondly,

GOD OFTEN SENDS US TO UNDESIRABLE PLACES TO DO UNDESIRABLE JOBS AS PREPARATION FOR US AND OTHERS, THOUGH WE MAY NEVER HAVE CHOSEN THIS OURSELVES. (II.)

Now let's notice carefully the way God worked in Pharaoh's life, in the cupbearer's life and in Joseph's life—as God wove their three lives together miraculously from a chained-up pit, a dungeon, a prison house. Turn to Genesis 41: 1-13. Only God could tell Joseph the meaning of the prison for him. "After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. So, in the morning, his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my offenses today. (I don't believe the cupbearer was thinking only, of his original

offense against Pharaoh, but also his offense against Joseph—forgetting for 2 years to tell the king about him.) The cup-bearer said, “When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.” Whew! It’s about time! Don’t you think? God’s timing was perfect. There had to be an inside route for God to get Joseph next to Pharaoh, and God found that place for him in a pitiful, disease-ridden, undesirable, unclean, chained-up, hurtful, crying out for hope, Egyptian prison. No long lines signing up for this.

Beloved, how many of us here today, right now have balked at God’s place He is sending us or someone we love, God’s plan which we differ with, or God’s dream we fail to accept or acknowledge our part we are to play in His dream? I told you these were hard lessons, and this one is hard. But don’t forget, the way up is down. He that humbles himself will be exalted. (James 4: 10) You see, most of us only look at God’s will with a view to the visible. “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the inside—on the heart. (I Samuel 16: 7) We can judge the Lord only if we possess all the facts, but none of us possess the smallest part of all the facts. For example, we hardly know our own hearts; much less other’s hearts, and we don’t really know our own real needs, what is best for us, or for others, and we know nothing about the future, but our Father knows all of that.

Time spent in undesirable places is not wasted time, and it certainly wasn’t wasted for Joseph in preparing for where God wanted him to be. There are times God brings us into places, trials, disciplines, and adventures we’d rather not participate in, which we prefer not or even refuse to have to deal with. We may be in a job causing us stress, not fulfilling us, or we may be facing health problems, or undergoing tests, or there may be massive tensions in our family life. We don’t choose these situations, any more than Joseph chose his imprisoned pit. Yet, as God was with Joseph in prison, He will be with us right now in undesirable situations. God is calling us today to be open to allowing Him to use us in situations and places He is calling us to or calling us to go through. Most of us only pray, “Lord, get me out of this pit,” just as Joseph prayed in Genesis 40: 14. It may be time to ask God to reveal Himself to us, and to show us how He wants to use us in our situation. Let God be the One to tell you the meaning of the place He is sending you. Refuse to call it what others do. God called me 41 years ago to Rock Springs, Wyoming, which was a dry barren desert, some called it the “armpit of America,” and Sixty Minutes called it in two nationally televised programs, “Sin-City USA.” One day many years ago, God told Sharon Taylor in a dream to tell

me, our church was “God’s Oasis in the Desert.” Let God tell you the meaning of where He sends you and what He calls you to do. Thirdly and lastly,

GOD OFTEN TESTS US BY EXALTING US TO SEE IF WE WILL GIVE HIM ALONE ALL THE GLORY. (III.) Notice verses 14-16 and watch for

Joseph to prepare himself quickly so he would be presentable to Pharaoh. Apparently, he must have looked like a shaggy dog with unkempt hair and a long untrimmed beard with no way to groom himself in prison. Only God could have shown to Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh’s dreams, so Joseph gave Him the glory. Look with me at Genesis 41: 14-16. “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

We are hearing the first words now out of Joseph’s mouth to Pharaoh. These two men were to rule the greatest nation on earth at the time for the next 30-40 years. Pharaoh and Joseph were destined to talk together almost every day as they grew in their trust and honoring of each other. First words are important. When Jacob, Joseph’s father came down to Egypt, and Joseph introduced him to Pharaoh, Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are days of the years of your life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.” What is the first word out of Joseph’s mouth to Pharaoh. Notice in v. 15, Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.” In the Hebrew, the first word is a negative word. It is “No. Then it is not in me.” Then Joseph added, “God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer, or an answer of peace.” Joseph did not say, “Well, as a matter of fact, I have interpreted a number of dreams.” Joseph raised a glorious banner of glory to God, taking no credit for any power in himself. Joseph never wanted Pharaoh to think of him as more than a servant of God. Pharaoh must learn the meaning of what it meant to choose a Prime Minister to stand beside him, a man of great integrity who gave all the glory to God.

Joseph was now on the cusp of being exalted to the heights for the rest of his long life, until he died at 110. Joseph to experience a sudden change in his fortune, in just one day, he was going from being a forgotten prisoner, who was languishing in an Egyptian prison cell, to becoming the second most powerful man in all of Egypt. In those many long years as a slave and prisoner, God prepared Joseph for one of the biggest tasks in all the world. So, what is Joseph’s first word to Pharaoh? Literally, he said, “It is beyond my power to do this, but God can tell you what your dreams mean. God will tell you the meaning and give you peace.”