

DREAMS INTERPRETED—GOD’S GIFT

Genesis 40: 1-23 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As we re-enter our Joseph story in Genesis 40, we find Joseph chained in prison. How do we know Joseph was in chains? Genesis doesn't tell us, but the unknown psalmist in Psalm 105: 16-18 is pretty case specific of Joseph's treatment in this Egyptian prison. We read, "When God summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, He had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came-to pass, the word of the Lord tested him. The king sent and released him. The ruler of the peoples set him free." When Joseph was waiting for God's deliverance in prison, he had no "inside knowledge" from the Lord regarding how or when or if he would ever get out. He certainly knew nothing about the baker or the butler, the cupbearer. It will profit us as we listen to this message today, to remember that Joseph had no hint about his future. He had no hint of how God was going to deliver him. He knew from his own dreams of God's promise to make him a ruler that even his brothers would bow down to. Ray Pritchard once said that Genesis 40 can be summarized by these few words: "In jail. Two men. Two dreams. Two interpretations. One lives, one dies. One man forgets. In jail." That's Genesis 40 in a-nutshell. Meanwhile, Joseph waited to see what would happen next.

Bob Deffinbaugh once said, "A couple I know had an experience which resembles events in the life of Joseph which we have studied up to this point. The husband went out to his car one morning only to discover that it wouldn't turn over because the battery had been stolen. After lifting up the hood, he discovered a note which said something to this effect: "I'm sorry I had to take your battery, but it was an emergency and I had to get to the hospital. I will return your battery as soon as I can." A little later the battery was returned with another note: "Thank you so much for the use of your battery. To express our appreciation and to make up for the inconvenience we have caused you, here are two tickets to the Dallas Cowboy game this Sunday." The couple was ecstatic. They were fans of the Cowboys and were thrilled at the opportunity to go to the game. What a wonderful turn of events this had been. But when they returned home from the game they discovered, to their dismay, that their apartment had been cleaned out. The football tickets had simply been a ruse to get them out of the house. They must have understood how Joseph was feeling as he continued to do real time in Pharaoh's dungeon and prison. We begin Genesis 40 with Joseph in prison and we end Genesis 40 with Joseph still chained up in prison.

Joseph was in prison for nothing evil he did, but because he belonged to the Lord. This chapter doesn't seem to help Joseph out much. We think we find hope in the

butler or the cupbearer's promise, but it's an empty hope. The chapter begins in prison and ends in prison for Joseph. Don't talk about what's fair and what's not fair. When we find ourselves in Joseph-like situations, we often wonder, "Why was I ever born?" "Who am I?" and "Am I willing to wait for God?" Are any of you in a situation where all you can do is wait for God's deliverance? Like Joseph, we can be startled because we are stuck with a bad deal, and there's no light at the end of the tunnel. All Joseph could do was wait for deliverance. He couldn't get himself out of prison, He couldn't appeal his sentence. He couldn't escape. He was stuck in this Egyptian prison far from home, where everyone thought he was long dead. He was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife. It wasn't a place for gaining in popularity. Yet we read in Genesis 39: 21-23: "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed."

Joseph didn't know why he was in prison or how long he would have to wait for God's deliverance, but he was obedient to the Lord, willing to wait for God. For most of us, we have read ahead in Joseph's story so we know how it ends. We know he will emerge from the dungeon unscathed, triumphant, and more in love with God than ever. We know that one day he will face his brothers who betrayed and sold him, not to say, "I told you so," but rather, (Genesis 50:20) "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Yet, remember, at this place in the story, Joseph never had a clue how God was going to work all things together for good for him because he loved God. Joseph knew no more about his future than you know about your future or that I know about my future. As one minister put it, "God never ever whispered to him, "Hang tough, old boy. Don't let this prison life get you down. It won't be long til' you're going to be the Prime Minister of Egypt." As I have contemplated this chapter, what God has taught me about dreams, about Joseph, the dreamer, and about his responses to two other dreamers, are lessons I dare not forget, and which we all need to know and we all dare not forget these lessons. What are these three lessons?

GODLY DREAMERS AND GODLY DREAM INTERPRETERS ARE OFTEN HELD IN CUSTODY, AND THEIR DREAMS ARE HELD IN CONTEMPT. (I.) Notice the words of Joseph to the cup-bearer, the butler in Genesis 40: 13-15. Some people think Joseph was unbelieving or not trusting God in these words. Rather, Joseph was simply speaking in the darkness of his pit, where he was held in custody, (v. 2) and he must have known what the enemy must have often brought to his mind, "If you wouldn't have had your own dreams you claimed were from God and told them, you wouldn't be in prison. Your

brothers wouldn't have betrayed and sold you." Now notice Joseph's words to the cupbearer, after he interpreted his dream. "In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. 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. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit." Is Joseph complaining? You might say so—or you might say to yourself, "What would I say to the cupbearer if I were in Joseph's shoes?" What I am trying to say is that when God gives us dreams, it isn't ours to choose when He will bring them to pass, or who, if anyone will believe our dreams. Since our dreams most often concern not only us, but others, be it our spouse, our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters, whomever—we'd better be ready for the onslaught of doubts, defaming, denouncing, decrying, denying that our dream or dreams came from God, and the whole onslaught of reactions and responses to our dreams fail to make our dreams something others want to speak about, think about, pray about or accept as from the Lord. If God ever truly gives you a dream and it is from Him, expect days, months, and perhaps years of loneliness and depression. You may at times feel like Joseph did, that you are in custody, and who knows when you'll get out, and your dreams are being held in contempt, and no one wants to talk about them. We know God makes everything beautiful in His time, Ecclesiastes 3: 11. Nevertheless, if you are in prison like Joseph was, or if you have seen an angel like Mary did, and your betrothed won't believe you, or if that same angel visit is confirmed to you in a dream as Joseph in Nazareth received it, and your town won't believe you, don't expect a long line of folks saying to you, "God has spoken to you and we wait with hope for the day He fulfills your dream.

The truth is: This whole subject of dreams is not only hard to preach on, but for many Christians, the idea of a God-given dream is anything but desired. The whole matter of dreams teaches us that a person who has had a couple God-given dreams, must first stand firmly on God's Word, and wait for His timing in fulfilling a dream from Him. God wants to teach us not to try to help Him out in fulfilling one of His dreams. Let me say a word about helping God out. God doesn't need or want your help or mine to fulfill His Word, or to fulfill a God-given dream. By saying that, we as believers, if we ever have a dream from God, we must swallow any pride we have about it, be willing to let the dream seem to die or go dormant or even appear to be forgotten. In other words, no amount of insisting God gave us the dream or insisting that others believe it, is worthwhile. God is God, and His dreams will come true in His way and in His time, without our help. Joseph couldn't help God out. I have witnessed parents with children trying to force what they say is their God-given dream for a child on one of their children and hurting them. I have seen grown men and women awaiting God's dream of giving them a

spouse, yet trying to help God out, jumping ahead of Him and grabbing someone to date or court. Really, it's not helping God at all, but throwing a monkey-wrench into His will that He has to override, by choosing for God, rather than waiting on His timing and choice. Waiting is perhaps the hardest discipline of the Christian life. Most of us hate to wait. Perhaps every last one of us are waiting for something right this minute. Waiting to get a job, waiting to see if the bank will give you a loan to buy a house, waiting for God to open the womb and give you children, waiting for loved ones to come to Christ, waiting to meet the right person to marry, waiting to be married, waiting for God to show you what to do, waiting for an offer of someone to buy your house, waiting for a person you love to be healed, waiting for a prayer to be answered, waiting for one of your children to come back to the Lord, and on it goes. All these may be dreams God has assured you He will fulfill. We dreamers spend most of our lives waiting. Most of life is waiting. Whatever custody God allows us to be in, is His school to teach us to wait for Him. This first lesson is hard, but learn it with me. Godly dreamers and godly dream interpreters are often held in custody, and their dreams are often held in contempt. Secondly,

GODLY DREAMERS AND GODLY DREAM INTERPRETERS MUST LEARN THAT GODLY INTERPRETATIONS BELONG TO GOD. (II.)

Notice verse 7-8. "So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today? They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them. And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me." Now we all know that since these two prisoners of Pharaoh held high offices in Egypt and had access to Pharaoh, God was up to something. The chief cup-bearer or butler was to protect Pharaoh by making certain the king's wine was prepared and safe to drink. This man must drink the king's wine first, and risk his life. If someone tried to poison Pharaoh, this cupbearer would die first. He could say to Pharaoh, "If someone tries to kill you by poisoning you, it will be over my dead body." This man, not the baker, this man served in the presence of the king always. He was a powerful man with access to the king's ear. The baker was a powerful man too, but his dream was not pleasant to learn about. Joseph didn't know what God was up to, but in retrospect, we do. God brought these two men into custody with Joseph to ultimately set Joseph free and to give him the place next to Pharaoh, the place of God's preparing to fulfill Joseph's dreams.

I have known very few people with Joseph's skill who refuse to flatter people or lie, but who listen to other's dreams and tell them exactly what God is saying like Joseph and Daniel did. Doubtless, Joseph had for years been contemplating his own two dreams. Now for the first time, Joseph is being given the chance by the Lord and the troubled butler and baker, to be a dream interpreter. The very fact that Joseph wasn't self-focused led him to notice the looks of dismay on the two men's

faces who shared prison time with him. Being the caring and discerning man Joseph was, and because God knew Joseph would give God the glory, God gave to Joseph the interpretation of the two dreams. The fact that Joseph said, “Do not interpretations of dreams belong to God?” shows that Joseph was a humble man, not out to bring himself glory, but to only glorify the Lord.

The test of a dream interpreter being of God is if the dream interpretations come true. (Same is true for a prophet. You may try to thwart a God-given dream someone has, but you will never stop God’s bringing His dream to come to-pass. You will only prolong the time it takes for God to bring the dream to pass, or you may by your denial of a dream’s truth, you may forfeit your right to be part of God’s fulfillment of His dream. Jesus had 12 disciples. Remember?! When Judas refused to believe Jesus’ words and trust Him, the greatest dream of all dreams—the dream of our salvation from before the foundation of the world, what did God do? When Judas betrayed his Lord, the task of the 12 disciples he shared, fell to another man by lot—to Matthias. Here’s how God brought His dream to pass when Judas ended his life after betraying Jesus in Gethsemane. Turn to Acts 1: 15-26:

“In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ““May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and ““Let another take his office.’ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection.” And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” All Godly dream interpretations belong to God. He will work them out with or without us, if we deny the place He has for us to fill. Thirdly,

GODLY DREAMERS AND GODLY DREAM INTERPRETERS MAY TEMPORARILY RELY ON OTHERS TO FULFILL GOD’S DREAMS, BUT GOD WILL RETURN THEIR HEARTS TO TRUST IN HIM ALONE.

(III.) Notice Genesis 40: 14, 15. After accurately interpreting the favorable dream for the butler, and the unfavorable dream to the baker, Joseph knew the baker's dream would not help him. The lifting up of the head of the cup-bearer was a figure for the king having one's case reconsidered, and restored. (See vs. 12, 13)—“In three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, But in the case of the baker, the lifting up of his head was also the interpretation, but that was almost a double meaning, for Joseph added from you. (See verse 19) “In three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you! and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.” The Egyptians didn't use the gallows but rather they beheaded the victim to be executed and then impaled his body on a stake. So, the baker's head was lifted up, but in a different way from the cup-bearer's head.

Joseph knew this butler, this cupbearer would be soon back before Pharaoh and he temporarily saw his way out of prison. So Joseph asked the cupbearer to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh—v. 15. Was Joseph getting ahead of God? Some say so. Others say he was trusting in man, because he was getting impatient. But the word merely reports Joseph's words without attempting to assign motives to them. Joseph said what most of us would have said, “Sympathize with my plight. You know this place is the pits. Talk to Pharaoh. Remember me so I will be taken out of here.” It is true that we must not ultimately turn to other people for help instead of waiting on the Lord. The psalmist tells us not to trust in man or chariots or horses who cannot save. Psalm 146: 3, and 5-6 says, “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever.”

Whatever Joseph had to learn, and it must have been hard for him, we read in Genesis 40: 21-23. “Pharaoh restored the chief cup-bearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cup-bearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.” Genesis 41: 1-2 tells us that two years went by and the cup-bearer still forgot about Joseph, but God did not forget him. Ultimately, I tell us all, dreamers many of us may be, and some of us may not be, but I close with this truth—God never forgets His own. He didn't forget about Joseph, and He will never forget about you or the dreams He has given you. He always keeps His Word. He always fulfills His Word. Trust Him alone. Amen.

