

**Genesis 40: 1-23; "Interpretations belong to God", Sermon # 101
in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on June 17th, 2007, in the Morning Worship Service.**

God's sovereignty extends much farther than most people are willing to admit. Most people cannot believe that God is even in control of the weather, let alone, that He is sovereign over their lives. They speak of "mother nature" and not of the One who "sends forth His thunder under the whole heaven, His lightning to the ends of the earth." This verse is found in Job 37: 3 and in verse 4, Elihu says "After He sends lightning, a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice, and He does not restrain them when His voice is heard." "God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend." "For He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth'; likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain of His strength." Most people are willing to admit that "God is in control" of this world in a general sense, and the great matters that determine the outcome of human history. But they are not willing to admit that His sovereignty extends even to the smallest matters of our lives. I think that this is because unbelieving people do not want to see themselves as "puppets on God's strings." They do not want to be under His righteous rule. They want desperately to believe that they are free to determine their own destiny and that God will not be the final determiner of all things. But I would assert to you this morning that if these thoughts were true, that God would not be God. "Our God is in the heavens," it says in Psalm 115, verse 3, "He does whatever He pleases."

This morning our subject is dreams and the interpretation of them. God is sovereign even over our dreams. It is not as though we do not have dreams that arise in our minds while we sleep, which come to us simply from the imaginations of our own hearts. But there are also dreams which have come to some people in their sleep which have great significance. And we find, when we look at the Scripture, that these people are often unbelieving people. When men have had dreams like this, they sense that there is a significance to them, and they would very much like to understand them. In Old Testament times God spoke to men sometimes, in their dreams, in a revelatory way. In other words, according to His Sovereign will, the very dreams that they dreamed were the way that He communicated His will to them and to other men around them. They were instructed by these dreams in the same way that you and I are now instructed by the completed Word of God which we have in the Holy

Scriptures. Listen to Job 33: 14, "For God may speak in one way or in another, yet man does not perceive it." "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction." "In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit."

There were also prophetic dreams that were sometimes given to men, which are recorded for us in the Scriptures. And these dreams have great significance, both to the individual that they were given to, but also to whole nations and kingdoms, and they affected the outworking of history in relation to kingdom of God. This is the kind of dreams that these 2 men, who did not know God, had. Joseph had a gift from God to be able to interpret the prophetic dreams of men. God taught Joseph, by His grace, and through His providential ordering of events, how to use this gift in a way that would fulfill God's purposes with regard to Joseph himself, and also in regard to everyone who the dream applied to. I am convinced that God does this also in the life of every faithful gospel preacher when he would use him in His service. And we will learn this morning that each and every believer can learn to effectively share the gospel of Christ from the way that God led and taught Joseph to use his gift. For the dreams that these 2 men had are representative of what unbelieving people think the true gospel is. The gospel which unbelieving people have in their minds is a dream which requires interpretation. The true interpretation of the dreams of men belongs to God. But God uses His servants, His ministers and preachers to be the interpreters of His Word and the gospel. In Acts chapter 8, when Philip ran up at the command of the Holy Spirit, and overtook the chariot of the man from Ethiopia, he asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "And he said, 'How can I unless I have an interpreter?'" In this incident, there was a dream which was favorable to the one man and not favorable to the other. The dreams that all unbelieving people have, either result in eternal life coming to them or eternal death coming to them. Each unbelieving person, if they are to be delivered from the prison of sin, needs an interpreter; whether that interpreter is a pastor, or whether it a Christian who has not been called to the ministry. You and I must be holy and wise interpreters of their dreams. We must be faithful to God and to the souls of men. What is it then, that you and I can learn from the way that Joseph used his prophetic gift of interpreting dreams?

The 1st Lesson of being able to effectively share the gospel with unbelieving people is; to learn to read the faces of the people who are around you. (Verses 6-8)

In this chapter we have 2 men who are servants of the king of Egypt; the chief butler and the chief baker. And the text says, "It came to pass after these things that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt." "And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker." "So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined." "And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while." Here we see how great the sovereignty of God was in the individual lives of these men. These prominent officials of Pharaoh's court had somehow got themselves in trouble with the king and they were thrown into the very prison over which Joseph had become an authority. This was no accident or coincidence. This was God's ordering of things for Joseph's good. You and I need to see our lives in this very way, if we are to be good witnesses to people around us. Each of these men had had a dream and each had had some hours to think about it. And neither man was happy. It says in verse 6, "And Joseph came into them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad." It is the Christians God given responsibility, in this jail of the fallen world that we live in, to take notice of people around us, unbelieving people around us who are doomed to perish if they can't find an interpreter for their life.

All around us today, there are people who are sad, people who are frustrated, people who are disappointed. And the reason that they are this way is because they are in a prison of their own making. They have had a view of life that is false. They thought that they could be rich, or great, or popular, or get what they want out of life by their own cunning cleverness. They have cared nothing for God and they care everything for themselves. Joseph could have told them this, that morning when he first saw them, but he didn't. He took notice of the fact that they were sad. He didn't just sit there and look at them in smug silence and say to himself, "Well, these guys are really getting what they deserve." "I think I'll just let them simmer for awhile in their own juices." "Perhaps they will wake up to the fact that sin has consequences and they have surely deserved whatever is going to happen to them." This is sometimes how Christians think. They do not think of how they can help. They think, rather unconsciously, in a self-righteous way. "I have discovered the meaning of life." "I was smart and these guys were dumb." But this kind of an attitude does not remember

how we ourselves once were before conversion. We too, were once sad and disappointed, and we did not understand. We all need to look at what Joseph did when he saw that these men were sad. Joseph was in authority in the prison, and yet he was commanded to serve these men. So, he took the initiative to show concern for them, and to have compassion upon them. This is what a Christian who is walking in the Spirit needs to do when he comes across unbelieving people who have gotten themselves in trouble with the law, or when they have simply come to a place where they are convicted of their sin. They need an interpreter to ask them if they have a right understanding of the dreams that they have had. "Why do you look so sad today?" he says to them. And they say to him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." "So Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' "Tell them to me, please." He does not berate them. He does not call them stupid. He asks them straightforward questions. He points them to God as the One who has the answer for their questions, and who can give them the answers that they need. They desired to know if there was hope for them in the situation that they were in.

Let me ask you whether you look at the faces of people around you, to see what they are going through? If they look sad, do you care enough about them, for God's sake, to ask them why they are sad? It may lead to a testimony of what God can do for them. Interpretations belong to God. As a Christian, you have the knowledge of salvation which would not only take away their sadness if they receive Christ, but you will have been an instrument in God's hands to save a soul from death. Remember the words of 1st John 5: 16? "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death." And the words in Jude 20-23, "But you beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." This is what Christians are called to do; to have compassion in the way that Joseph did. This often begins by looking at the faces of people around you and taking the initiative to ask the appropriate questions.

The 2nd Lesson of being able to effectively share the gospel with unbelieving men is; to faithfully share the difference between the gospel of grace which saves, and the gospel of works which will not.

(Verses 9-13 and 16-22)

These two gospels are revealed in the dreams of these two men; the chief butler and the chief baker. The butler's dream comes first, and it relates to the gospel of grace. It says in verse 9, "Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, 'Behold, in my dream a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes.'" "The Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup; and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." Now Pharaoh was the one who held the power of life and death in hands in regard to these two men. And God is the One and the only One who has the power of eternal life and eternal death in His hands. This butler's dream was of a vine with 3 branches. Even though it is not mentioned by Joseph, I believe that the vine is representative of Christ's life and sufferings and death; through whom sinners, who are represented by this butler, would be mercifully spared. In John Chapter 15 Jesus calls Himself the Vine, and here there are indications that it is His future finished work on the cross that is being hinted at in this dream. Within 3 days, the butler would be brought out of prison. Jesus Christ was 3 days and 3 nights in the tomb, "the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12: 40) Pharaoh would "lift up his head" in showing the butler this mercy, and he would be "restored to his place." God is called the believer's "glory and the One who lifts up his head," in Psalm 3: 3. The butler would be delivered from death and brought out of the prison. The way that the butler finds favor in Pharaoh's sight is pictured for us in the dream by the butler's "taking the grapes and pressing them into Pharaoh's cup." If the Vine represents Christ, the grapes being pressed represent His death. They are pressed into Pharaoh's cup, because it was God's Justice and God's good pleasure that were satisfied by the death of Jesus Christ.

Each and every sinner has to press the grapes into Pharaoh's cup spiritually speaking. The satisfaction of punishment for the offences that he has committed must fall upon Christ. His future acceptance and usefulness in God's kingdom are all based upon this. When a sinner does this; trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ to satisfy God, then the sinner can come back into the position for which he was originally created; which is, to serve the King. And being restored to that position, he can then be useful and fruitful in his service. I hope that you see the parallel between what happened to the butler and what happens to each person who trusts in Jesus Christ. The butler "took the grapes of the vine" which had the three braches which budded, and he "pressed them into Pharaoh's cup." This was what pleased the Pharaoh. The wrath of the King is turned away by the sinner exercising faith in Christ's blood, the cup of

Christ's sufferings. Have you done this, O sinners among us this morning? Have you taken Christ to be your Savior from sin and Christ to be the One who stood in your place of judgment before the Father? This is all of grace. It is the dream which was interpreted favorably by Joseph.

The baker's dream comes second, and it relates to the gospel of works. It says in verse 16, "When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, 'I also was in my dream, and there were three white baskets on my head.'" "In the uppermost basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out the basket on my head." This dream represents things which the baker prepared for the Pharaoh by which he would try to regain his favor once again. The birds eating out of the baskets show that he would be entirely unsuccessful in these attempts at presenting that which he thought would please the Pharaoh; trying to appease him by his good works for whatever he had done to offend him. Pharaoh was not going to buy it, and neither will God. Whenever we make up our own way of acceptance with God; thinking that our own good works will merit His favor, we will utterly fail. The best of our works still have flaws in them and they cannot make up for the things that we have done that have slighted and injured the honor and glory of God. When we come to believe that our own thoughts, about what God should be pleased with, should be the basis of God accepting us, without looking at the Bible to see what He thinks; this is something that God utterly rejects. We do not judge God and His Word by our own puny thoughts. The baker waited to see if the butler received a good interpretation for his dream and only then did he speak about his own. He was hopeful that every man's dream had the same interpretation and that every man's dream would turn out all right in the end. Many people want this to be true in our day as well. They think that their own ideas of God, apart from the Bible, must be just as good as any other man's; just so that he is sincere. But if you sincerely do not want God's way of salvation which is found in the Bible, and you want to make up your own definitions of what is spiritually true, and the standard for acceptance; you have rejected God and Christ. This is a very deadly error in your thinking if you have decided to take this route. But thousands take it every day and hold to that path all their life. It is the broad road to destruction. Men must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. They must be born again to enter the Kingdom of heaven. And this comes only by the sovereign choice and power of God. Have you been born again, or do you think that you can be a Christian without this glorious work of the Holy Spirit? You will lose your soul if you make a mistake at this point. This is what happened to the chief baker.

Pray to know Christ in a saving way and not just to be a professed Christian in a social way.

The 3rd Lesson of being able to effectively share the gospel is to realize that your reward for being faithful to preach the gospel is from the Lord and not men. (Verses 14, 15, and 23)

We now find Joseph, after giving his favorable interpretation to the chief butler saying, "But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house." "For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon." And in verse 23 it says, "Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Now you would think that a man who had been given such a favorable interpretation as this butler was given, by Joseph, would be very anxious to remember the one who had declared such good news to him. But he did not, even when Joseph had expressly pleaded with him to do so. How could this possibly be? The reason for it is to be found in God's sovereign purpose for Joseph, once again. Joseph had just preached a gospel, of sorts, to this man. It was a gospel of God's mercy and grace to him even when he did not deserve it. And now God must show Joseph that there were things that He wanted him to learn about His ways, in regard to being a leader, even there in the dungeon of Egypt. The chief butler would not remember Joseph for 2 full years. I would say to you that this was God's intention, so that Joseph would learn to fully depend upon God for everything; especially in times of disappointment. Joseph had been given a very great gift of interpretation of dreams. But he needed to know that neither his use of that gift, or the help of any man, could deliver him from his predicament. He needed to learn to rest and rely solely upon God for such a deliverance, and for any future usefulness and advancement among men. He needed to learn that God alone could change things and bring good out of evil. He needed to know how to follow God even when men would disappoint him. All this would be learned in those 2 years. Turn with me to Psalm 105. Psalm 105 is a psalm of God's faithfulness. It is a psalm of praise which declares the mighty works of the Lord and His covenant faithfulness to all generations. In recounting God's wonderful works Abraham and Jacob are mentioned in verses 9-15, and then Joseph's story is given in brief compass. Verse 16 says, "Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread." "He sent a man before them--Joseph who was sold as a slave." "they hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons, until the time when His word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him." Now here is found the truth of the matter.

God would have Joseph to stay there in the prison so that His fellowship with God became such that Joseph's soul entered fully into everything that God had prepared for him. God had intended greatness for him. He would have him be deeply humbled and sorrowful of it ever happening, apart from God's will and mercy, as he lay there in pain, in fetters in the prison. God intended to give him great wisdom and compassion as a leader. But He would first have him cry for it in prayer day after day, for two full years, for himself. God held him there, with cords of love, until he had tested Joseph's heart and mind fully, on every point of internal heart obedience, to Him as his God and King, and then He knew that Joseph was ready to be this great leader that He had called him to be. Chuck Swindoll used to say, as I would listen to him on the radio, "When God is going to mightily use a man, He first crushes him." Certainly this was true with Joseph.

The truth that we should consider in closing is this. It was not wrong for Joseph to ask the chief butler to help him to come out of the prison. We should always use the right means to the end. This was the right means. It simply was not the right time. It was not God's time to release Joseph. It would be two full years, two long years later. The Lord had not forgotten Joseph. No He was scrutinizing every detail of his sanctification, overseeing it personally until the time was right. Will you not learn the lesson this morning; that if you would be an effective messenger of the gospel and the Word of God, that you will only become so when God has humbled you personally to depend fully upon His wisdom, grace, and power, in the timing of things in your life? Will you not realize that God's purpose is so much greater than you alone. It is with all the people that your life will touch. And if He does not teach you communion with Himself in all of your trials and disappointments that you will eventually give up following Him and try to go back to your former life as an unbeliever. But this never happens with those whom God has called according to His purpose. God will be faithful to be there for you and with you even in your darkest and most difficult hours; even in the dungeons of your life. Joseph's soul entered into the iron of God's purpose for him. He was discouraged at some points. But his faith never failed, because of the faithfulness of God to him during that time. God meant it all for Joseph's good as we shall see in coming weeks.