

**Genesis 40: 1-23; “The Dreams & the Interpretation”, Sermon # 101
in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on September 29th, 2019, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We see here in these verses, that prophetic dreams were given to these men who were in the prison with Joseph; the chief butler and the chief baker. They were dreams which would require Joseph’s help in interpreting them. With his help, they would be able to know what their dreams meant, and what would become of them. My proposition to you this morning from this passage is this: The dreams that these two men had, are representative of the dreams of unbelieving people; how they think when they find themselves in the prison which their own sinful actions have brought them into.

Having that awful sense of confusion and sadness, which always goes along with understanding the guilt of your sins, you are hoping for a way out. If the Spirit is working in your heart, you want to be pardoned; you want to be released from the prison of guilt. Joseph was in this same physical prison as these men were, but not because of anything wrong that he had done wrong. He had done everything that God had wanted him to do in all the situations of his life where he faced temptation. And so, because he had a clear conscience, he was able to minister to these men.

The question which I bring to you at this hour is this: Can we learn, as Joseph did, how to minister to people who are imprisoned in their souls and spirits because of their sins? The dreams which people all around us have, may involve many different subjects, but you and I as Christians know what the meaning of life is. We may not know all about what will befall us in this life, but we do know that our life will eventually have a good outcome because we have found an interpreter in our heavenly Joseph, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of His life, His death, and resurrection, that our life can be given a favorable interpretation.

And so, I am saying, that we as Christians may be in a position to be able to help others, because we know Christ, and because we do know something of His word. However, we must be faithful to God, like Joseph, if we would really help people around us. Let us understand that we cannot always give people a good interpretation of their dreams, but we can give them the gospel. And we can share God’s word with them.

What is it then, that you and I can learn from, by the way that Joseph used his prophetic gift of interpreting dreams, that will help us in our learning to minister to people around us? I believe that in these verses, that Joseph has given us 3 good lessons of how we can effectively share the gospel with people around us who are looking for a favorable interpretation to their life.

The 1st Lesson is this – Learn to read the faces of the people around you. (verses 5-8)

Verse 5 says – “Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man’s dream in one night and each man’s dream with its own interpretation.” “And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.” “So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, ‘Why do you look so sad today?’ “And they said to him, ‘We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.’” Now, before I talk to you about the sadness of these men, I want you to think with me about their having these particular dreams, for a few moments. I hope that you can see from these verses that God is sovereign, even over a person’s dreams. Now, don’t get me wrong; it is not as though we do not have dreams that arise in our minds spontaneously while we sleep; dreams which come to us simply from the workings of our own mind, and the imaginations of our own hearts.

But I believe that the Scriptures themselves teach us that there are also dreams which God gives to some people in their sleep, which have great significance. When people have had

dreams like this, they sense that there is a significance to them, and they would very much like to understand them. The Scriptures tell us that God sometimes does speak to men in their dreams, in a way which reveals His will in the gospel. 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.” In this chapter that we are studying, we have 2 men who are servants of the king of Egypt; the chief butler and the chief baker. And the text says in verse 1 – “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.”

So 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 and for the good of these men. You and I need to see our lives in this very way, if we are ever to be good witnesses to people around us.

Each of these men had had a dream, and each of them 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.” Let us make application to ourselves. It is to the Christians who live in this fallen world of sin and woe, that God has given the responsibility to, to take notice of people around us; of their countenance. Unbelieving people around us need the gospel. They need the good news that there is salvation for those who will trust in Jesus.

Let us be cognizant of the fact that unbelievers are doomed to perish if they can’t find an interpreter for their life. In this jail, of the fallen sinful world that we live in, there are many people who are sad. But the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. See the contrast between Joseph and these men. Joseph had what they needed; they needed an interpretation of their dreams. All around us today, there are many people who are sad and they are frustrated. They are people who have been, and are, disappointed with their life. And the reason that they are this way, is because they are in a prison of their own making.

They have a view of life that is false. They thought that they could be rich, or great, or popular; they thought that they could get what they wanted out of life by their own 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 that I will just let them simmer in their own juices for a while. Perhaps they will wake up to the fact that sin has consequences, and they surely deserve whatever is going to happen to them.

Sadly this is sometimes how Christians think. They do not think of how they can help. Instead they think, rather unconsciously, in a self-righteous way. They say to themselves – I have discovered the meaning of life. I have been reading my Bible and I am living according to righteous principles. I have been smart and these guys have been dumb. But, you see, this kind of an attitude is not good. It fails to remember how we ourselves once were, before we came to Christ. We too, were once sad and disappointed.

And there was a time when we ourselves were once foolish and we did not understand the meaning of life. We all need to look at what Joseph did, when he saw that these men were sad. Joseph was a man in authority in that prison, and yet he intended 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 they come 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 did not berate them. He did not judge them as being unworthy of being given help. He asked them straightforward questions. He kindly inquired of them. And then he pointed them to God as the One who had the answer for their questions; that He was the One and who could give them the answers that they needed. They desired to know if there was hope for them in the situation that they were in. Let me ask you whether you, as you look at the faces of people around you, whether you see what they are going through? If they look sad, do you care enough about them, for the Lord’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 could not only take away their sadness, if they receive Christ; but you also could become 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 God 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. They are called to have compassion in the way that Joseph had compassion. 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 of grace and the law, with those who do not understand. (verses 9-13 and 16-22)

The law and the gospel 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 he 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, we should remember that Pharaoh was the one who held the power of life and death in his 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. The butler’s dream was of a vine with 3 branches. And even though it is not mentioned by Joseph, I believe that the vine is representative of Christ’s life and His sufferings and death. He is the only One, through whom sinners, who are represented by this butler, will be saved from eternal death.

In John Chapter 15 Jesus calls Himself the Vine, and here there are indications that it was His future finished work on the cross that was 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, in “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”, it says in Psalm 3, verse 3. The butler would be delivered from death and brought out of the prison, to a new and better life.

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. The grapes were pressed into Pharaoh's cup, because it was God's Justice and God's good pleasure, in terms of granting His salvation to a sinner, that all the claims of righteousness were satisfied by the death of Jesus Christ. Each and every sinner has to, as it were, press the grapes into Pharaoh's cup, spiritually speaking. The satisfaction of the punishment for all of the offences that you have committed, must fall upon Jesus Christ.

Your acceptance by God and your usefulness in God's kingdom are all based upon this. When any sinner does this by faith, pressing the grapes into God's cup, spiritually speaking; they are trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ to satisfy God's justice. If you do this, you the sinner can come back into the position for which you were originally created; which is, to serve the King of Glory. And after you are restored to that position by grace, you then can come to be useful and fruitful in His service. I hope that you can 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 branches which budded, and he "pressed them into Pharaoh's cup".

This was what pleased the Pharaoh. Similarly, the wrath of the God is turned away from you, the sinner, by your exercising faith in Christ's blood; the cup of Christ's sufferings. Have you done this? Have you taken Christ to be your Savior, to deliver you from sin, and all the guilt of sin? Have you taken Christ to be the One who stood in your place of judgment before the Father? It is all of grace if you do. This is the dream which was interpreted favorably by Joseph. It was a picture of faith in the gospel which brings deliverance from wrath, and brings a person to have eternal life.

The baker's dream then comes second, here, and it relates to the law and the baker's 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 had prepared for the Pharaoh (that is his good works) by which he would try to regain Pharaoh's favor once again.

The birds eating out of the baskets show that he would be entirely unsuccessful in these attempts at presenting what he thought would please the Pharaoh; trying to appease him by his good works; for the things he had done to offend him. Pharaoh was not going to buy it, and neither will God. Whenever you make up our own way of acceptance with God; when you believe that your own good works will merit God's favor, you will utterly fail. Each of us should understand that the best of our works still have flaws in them. They cannot possibly make up for the things that we have done that have dishonored God and have offended Him.

When you come to believe that God should be pleased with your own thoughts, and that these thoughts that you have about yourself should be the basis of His accepting you, without your ever looking at the Bible to see what God thinks of your works, this is something that God utterly rejects. You are simply looking at things from your own standpoint. God's ways are higher than your ways, and His thoughts than your 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 dream. He was hopeful that every man's dream had the same interpretation, and that his dream would turn out all right in the end, just as the butler's had.

Many people want this to be true in our day as well. They want to think that their own ideas of God, apart from the Bible, must be just as good as any other person's. They believe that they are 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 you take these

definitions as the standard for your being accepted by God; you have actually rejected God's way of salvation in Christ. This is a very deadly error in many people's thinking. But millions of people hold to their own thoughts about how to be saved, and they hold to that path all their life. It is called "the broad road that leads to destruction" in the Bible. But all people must believe in God's interpretation of life and eternal life, in order to be saved. They must be born again to enter the Kingdom of heaven. And this New Birth comes only by the sovereign choice and power of God in relation to the preaching of the gospel. Believing in the gospel brings God's favorable interpretation.

What should the chief baker have done that day? He should have done what the Philippian jailer did when his whole life began unraveling before his eyes. He should have said to Joseph – What must I do to be saved? Is there any hope for me? And the answer is – Yes there is! God saves people and delivers them from sin and death by means of a promise; the promise of Christ. The answer for all who fear death today is – "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

Now, we need to understand that if someone is guilty before the law, and they deserve death for the crimes that they have done, and then they become a Christian while they are awaiting the death sentence, they may still suffer the punishment of physical death. Their body may have to be put to death, and this is only righteous, but their soul will never die. And in the resurrection they will be glorified by being given a body transformed and brought to life by Christ, to live forever. Such is still a favorable interpretation.

I am saying that such people will die physically, but they shall die in the sure and certain hope of salvation if they believe in Jesus. You must, however, at all costs, come to understand that salvation is all of grace, and not of your own works. Sometimes people become fatalistic about their own salvation because they have had a dream or heard a voice. They think that they are doomed because they have had such an experience.

The great poet William Cowper was like this. He at times heard a voice pronouncing his doom, and there were times when he even tried to attempt to take his own life. But God had mercy upon him and he entered a mental hospital run by a Dr. Cotton, and during that time he truly came to know the Lord. Yes, he was saved, but he still had many doubts about His acceptance with God. What should William Cowper have done? Should he have listened to those voices which were telling him in his head that he was doomed, or should he have believed in God's word?

Well, no doubt, he should have believed in God's word, even over the experience of his mind and heart, in every case of his being tempted to think that he was a castaway. I believe that ultimately he did realize that he had believed in God's word, and he did continue to believe in what Christ had done for him, and thus he was saved. But because he also sometimes listened to the voice of doom, speaking to his conscience, his faith was shaken, and he thought the worst of himself.

Let us all understand that it is faith in Christ which brings us the victory by which we overcome the all of our doubts concerning ourselves, and our eternal destiny. It is the assurance of faith which leads us to have that tangible assurance of our having hope; the hope of eternal life realized by us, more and more, in our experience as a Christian.

The 3rd Lesson 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 his becoming a leader, lessons which God knew that Joseph could only learn there in the dungeon. The chief butler would not remember Joseph for 2 full years! I want you once again to see that this happened to Joseph according to God's purpose. It happened 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 it was not his use of that gift, or the help of any man, which could deliver him from his predicament. He needed to learn to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. He had to learn to 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 this – "Moreover God 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." The phrase, "He was laid in irons", it says in the margin can be translated – "until his soul entered in to the iron".

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 would become such, that his soul would enter fully into the iron; until his soul entered into everything that God had prepared for him to learn. God had intended greatness for him. He would have him be deeply humbled over it, and sorrowful over it ever coming to pass, as he lay there in pain, in fetters in the prison. But God was working it for his good. God intended for him to learn to be wise and compassionate as a leader. And He would have Joseph cry to Him 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 his heart and mind fully, on every point of internal heart obedience, to Him as his God and King. And at the end of that time, then God knew that Joseph was ready, and He had the Pharaoh have an amazing dream himself; a dream which would lead to Joseph's release and promotion to be second in command to Pharaoh. 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. That was the right means. It simply was not the right time.

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 your concerns, alone? His purpose is with all the people that your life will touch.

If He does not teach you communion with Himself in all of your trials and disappointments, you may even eventually give up trying to follow Him at all? But can you go back to your former life as an unbeliever? No, not if you truly know Him. This will not happen 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 his good as we shall see in coming weeks.