

Dreamin' My Life Away 1/20/08

Joseph, what a man of integrity! Last week we saw him face sexual temptation, the temptation to be unfaithful to the man God had placed him under, and he resolutely resisted. He said he could not sin against his master and against God. We saw that he was able to take such moral high-ground because he believed God's promises to him and knew the LORD was with him. Hopefully we all saw and understood that this is the very reason that we can stand against temptation. The LORD has given us precious promises of transformation and translation. We will be like the Son because He finishes the work He starts. (Philippians 1:6) He will not leave us or forsake us either. (Matthew 28:20) That should be a constant reality in our lives.

Our passage this week finds Joseph in charge of the prison of the captain of the guard. The psalmist told us that he was held in stocks. (Psalm 105:18) Over time, he proved to be reliable and a great help to the warden and eventually was elevated to the warden's chief assistant. Notice verse one begins "some time later". From the beginning of the next chapter we learn that Joseph is 28-years-old at the time of this story. It probably took a few years to earn the trusted position he held. We don't know how long he lived in Potiphar's house or how long he was a prisoner, but we do know it has been 11 years since his brothers sold him. All that time he kept his faith. Remember that he was able to do that because of his confidence that the LORD was with him. 39:23

This portion of the story reminds us of the New Testament story of Paul and Silas. After having been beaten they, too, were put in stocks. (Acts 16:23-24) Though we aren't specifically told that Joseph was beaten, considering the crime with which he was charged I'd be surprised if he went into prison without a beating. Paul and Silas began to sing praises to God, and God soon released them through a miraculous earthquake that opened their doors and stocks. (Acts 16:25-26) The result was the warden and his family were saved. I'd venture to say that Joseph's warden must have asked about the God of this Hebrew who was so anointed in administration.

² Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ^{4a} The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. I never noticed before that it was the captain of the guard that assigned them to Joseph. Remember that this captain is the same one that threw Joseph in prison. This lends some credence to the idea that Potiphar suspected his wife had made a false accusation. The wording seems to indicate that Joseph is a servant to the king's staff during their incarceration.

⁶ When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" Joseph was not only an anointed

Commented [notes1]: 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Commented [notes2]: Matthew 28:20 (NIV) 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Commented [notes3]: Psalms 105:18 (NIV) 18 They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,

Commented [notes4]: Genesis 39:23 (NIV) 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Commented [notes5]: Acts 16:23-24 (NIV) 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Commented [notes6]: Acts 16:25-26 (NIV) 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

administrator, but he was discerning as to the human condition. He cared about individuals. Perhaps that is one thing that helped him do his job so well. If we compare this new tenderness to the way the days of his youth when he flaunted his position before brothers, we would have to say that difficulty has matured him and softened his heart. (37:4-5)

It is hard to relate to those who are going through something you haven't dealt with. But when we have been through something, we can sympathize with others who are going through that same thing. Joseph is learning to be compassionate toward those whose future is uncertain. It is a lesson that will serve him well in years to come. God's preparation for manager of a worldwide crisis was not business school or being a prince. It was slavery and imprisonment. You may think you should have gone to one school or another, but God has you in the school of life for His intended purposes. What you are going through is preparation for days yet to come.

Some people consider a caring heart a distraction from being a good manager. On the contrary, when workers know that a manager cares about them, they will give of their talents more sincerely and can even be more understanding when they receive bad news. Joseph cared about these men. He could see on their faces they were troubled. Instead of not wanting to get involved, he immediately asked what was troubling them.

⁸ *"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."* There is never a question in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, that dreams can be a message from God. I have been confronted by people that insist that God does not use dreams today. New Testament characters were warned of God in dreams, Joseph (Matthew 2:13), Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19), and the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:9). The prophet Joel predicted that in the last days the old men would dream dreams. (Joel 2:28) Just like any revelation, it must not contradict the word of God. (Isaiah 8:20)

I had a dream about this church that the Lord brought to pass. It encouraged me to persevere through a time of difficulty. I guess you can call me an old man. It is not that every dream is a message from the Lord, but sometimes you have a clear memory of the details and sense that it is significant. Seek the Lord and find out what He is saying. Interpretations belong to God. This is the third time we see Joseph interpreting dreams in the Joseph story, and the big one is yet to come.

Joseph didn't boast, "I have the gift of interpreting dreams!" No, he said that interpretations belong to God. He was careful to give God all the glory for his gift. This shows his humility and confidence in the LORD. We should learn from Joseph how to speak of God given gifts.

Egyptians also believed that dreams were often communication from the spiritual realm. There were even books that kept records of dreams and their

Commented [notes7]: Genesis 37:4-5 (NIV)
4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.
5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

Commented [notes8]: Matthew 2:13 (NIV)
13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Commented [notes9]: Matthew 27:19 (NIV)
19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

Commented [notes10]: Acts 16:9 (NIV)
9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Commented [notes11]: Joel 2:28 (NIV)
28 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Commented [notes12]: Isaiah 8:20 (NIV)
20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

interpretations, checking to see if the symbolic interpretations were correct. We cannot rely on a set of symbols as they did. Interpretation is from the LORD.

The chief cupbearer was the person that tested the pharaoh's wine to be sure it was not poisoned. He had a trusted position. He related the dream to Joseph. ^{9b} *He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."*

Joseph seems to have immediately received the interpretation. His interpretation was in line with Egyptian literature on dream symbolism, but Joseph gave the credit to God, not the techniques of men. The three branches were three days. In three days the cupbearer would have his job back (lift his head), restoring him to that trusted position. You can see by the next verse that Joseph was clinging to his first dreams of becoming a person of importance. ¹⁴ *But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.*" He still believed that God could fulfill those early dreams he had of his brothers bowing before him. That is faith!

He saw his circumstances, dire as though they were, as the steppingstones to the fulfillment of the dreams God gave him so long ago. You don't hear a hint of doubt from any recorded words of Joseph. That is exactly how we should be when we face hardship. We should be looking for God to fulfill His promises. (Isaiah 34:16)

I don't know if he thought he was assisting God in bringing the dreams to pass by asking the cupbearer to speak to the Pharaoh on his behalf, or if he should have stayed quiet and just believed. I'm like Joseph in this regard. If I think I have some direction from the LORD, I'll tell anyone that might be an instrument in bringing it to pass. In the rest of the story we see it was God and not Joseph's request that brought about the fulfillment of the dreams. In the chapters that follow, see how God needed no assistance from man to bring His will to pass.

This favorable interpretation gave the baker hope that he would get good news as well. ¹⁶ *When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. ¹⁷ In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."* Joseph sadly interpreted the dream. In three days, the chief baker's head would be lifted as well, right off his shoulders. He would be impaled on a stick for the birds to devour his flesh.

I wondered why God would give these men who were Gentile unbelievers, and in all probability idol worshippers, a dream. God loves the world. (John 3:16) Even the unbeliever is given revelations. (Daniel 2:28) To the cupbearer, it was an encouragement not to fear. To the baker it was a warning to prepare for his death.

Commented [notes13]: Isaiah 34:16 (NIV)
16 Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together.

Commented [notes14]: John 3:16 (NIV)
16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [notes15]: Daniel 2:28 (NIV)
28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

To Joseph it was assurance that his earlier dreams would come to pass just as he understood these dreams and saw them fulfilled.

²⁰ Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, ²² but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. In late Egyptian history, the Pharaoh's birthday was a day when prisoners could receive pardons. Joseph watched the details of his interpretation come to pass. It must have filled him with hope. Surely the moment of his release was at hand. Surely God had brought all these things together at the set time to accomplish what He had predicted in the dreams.

A day passed, and then another, and another. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months. The months turned into years. ²³ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. He probably intended to say something, but busyness and protocol kept pushing it to a later time, until he finally just forgot about Joseph.

The interpretation of the dreams was spot on. But the hope that he more than likely attached to the dreams was from his own heart. I can relate to these unforeseen delays. You probably can too. Why are disappointments so essential to our spiritual growth? Why are they so common among those who have a heart for God? It's because we must learn to place our complete confidence in the LORD and His timing. In other words, we must learn to have faith in God, not our own desires and reasoning. God alone knows the best time and way for things to come about. (Psalm 22:28)

In *The Disciplines of Life*, V.R. Edman wrote, "Delay never thwarts God's purposes; it only polishes His instrument." In two more years Joseph would be faced with all the seduction, intrigue, and politics of the royal court of Egypt. How was God to prepare him for such constant temptations and pressures? God knew Joseph and knew what would prepare him. God knows you and what will prepare you for the plans He has for your life. (Jeremiah 29:11)

One might wonder about these ancient stories. Why didn't God just have Moses write a short paragraph about Joseph struggling but arriving at the top? Why all these personal stories and interactions? I believe it is for us to completely relate to them. We see ourselves in them. The stories stick in our minds and hearts and challenge us. We are reading Joseph's story, because we want to understand our own delays and disappointments. We need to know they are in our life for a purpose.

Joseph's walk of faith encourages us to have faith as we travel on our own journey. His certainty that God would keep His word encourages us to have that

Commented [notes16]: Psalms 22:28 (NIV)
28 for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

Commented [notes17]: Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)
11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

same certainty. His confidence that God was with him, challenges us to have that same confidence even when the days turn into months and the months into years.

You may think you will never be given a calling so great as Joseph's. Why should you go through delay and disappointment? Joseph will later tell his brothers that all of this was God's plan for the saving of many souls. (50:20) Joseph was speaking in a literal sense of saving the area from starvation, but we can easily see the spiritual parallel. Even if the Lord uses you to influence just one soul to come to Christ, wouldn't the training of delay and disappointment be worth it? God is working with us as He did with Joseph to prepare us to be vessels fit for our calling in this world, but also for eternity.

Commented [notes18]: Genesis 50:20 (NIV)
20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

In the Bible, we are told that believers will reign with Christ. (Revelation 20:6) In a very real sense we are just like Joseph in that we are being prepared to reign too. Your lessons here will serve you in eternity. You had years of enslavement to sin. You were imprisoned by your desires. There is also the delays and disappointments of daily life. All these things are teaching us priceless lessons we will use here and take with us into eternity. (Romans 5:3-5) We live in the dungeon of this present world with the anticipation that any day the King of kings will call us into the palace, and everything will be made new.

Commented [notes19]: Revelation 20:6 (NIV)
6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

We have been watching the types and shadows of Christ. We have already seen a great number of similarities in the life of Joseph and that of Jesus. Today we have one more. Joseph was punished with two others. One was restored and going to a better place where Joseph was going. One was condemned. There is an obvious parallel with the two thieves that were crucified with Jesus. All of them were condemned together, but Jesus told the repentant one that he would be with Him in Paradise. (Luke 23:43) In that sense, the cupbearer and baker represent the two kinds of people in the world, those who will come to Christ and humbly accept Him as Lord, and those who go on in their pride to their own destruction.

Commented [notes20]: Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)
3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.
5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

God resists the proud but raises up the humble. Which of the two do you resemble this morning? Are you like the thief on the cross that repented, who saw in Jesus something he had never seen before. As he watched Jesus die, he knew He had the power and authority to forgive his sins and make him worthy of heaven. Have you had that revelation? Both thieves saw the same thing. Surely both were convicted, but one hardened his heart. Jesus invites us to enter His kingdom today and for eternity.

Commented [notes21]: Luke 23:43 (NIV)
43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

This benediction is part of the message. It is God's promise to us as those dreams were to Joseph. We can cling to it. We can count on it:
²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (NIV)

