

"God's Plan For Joseph Unveiled in Time"

November 28, 2012

All right, let's open our Bibles - Genesis 40. It is our intention to do two chapters. We are doing that because these chapters of the Bible run together as far as telling us a story, and because they are narrative, narrative requires that you look at the story and then learn and make application. And this is, I think, our 31st week in the book of Genesis.

I'll tell you what we're doing next - you want to know? Exodus. (Laughing) We're going to do Exodus. But then I'm going to stop, and then we're going to do the book of Matthew on Wednesday nights. So we're going to do Genesis, Exodus and then Matthew. And then on Sunday mornings, we're going to stop with our lesser-known characters of the Bible at the end of the year, and the first week in January, we're going to start an in-depth look at the book of Ecclesiastes. So, I'm looking forward to that. That's a great book for our time. I'm telling you that for sure.

How many of you have seen the Wizard of Oz? Look at you. What's wrong with the rest of you? (Laughing) Where did you grow up? In 1939, I think, the "Wizard of Oz" came out, and it hit the screens, and I think every generation has seen it. I remember seeing it the first time - I think I was five or six - but I remember watching it from under the couch because I hated that wicked witch and those monkey-like characters. I would dream of them. I was afraid of them. I was sure they were in my closet. "Mom, come check one more time before I go to sleep." And that wicked witch was the worst witch, wasn't she? But you remember how the movie started? Judy Garland, Dorothy, singing "Somewhere Over The Rainbow." Right? "Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high.....there's a land that I dreamed of, once in a lullaby. Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue.....and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true." But there was no Wizard of Oz, and there was no tin man who needed a heart, and there was no scarecrow who lacked a brain, and there was no lion who lacked courage. There was no man behind the curtain - because Dorothy awoke, at home, from a dream. Right? This was a case of, "It was all in her head."

Yet, you get to the Bible, and there's not dreams here. These aren't fanciful stories. This is God's Word, right, that we've been studying. And as such, God intends us to learn from them. And we're studying a young man whose life is, in

many ways, directed by the dreams that surround him. He had lots of dreams, or he was involved with those who did, and in many ways, they are turning points in his life. And to this point and beyond, as we'll see tonight - in his life, dreams did come true. He had a couple of them as a teenager at home with his brothers, who didn't like him because his dad favored Joseph because he was the offspring of his wife that he loved the most, Rachel - the one that he had seen - love at first sight. And his dad had given him a coat of many colors, and even though he was the youngest (except for Benjamin, who came along later), he got a coat that said he was the "supervisor." He didn't work. The other brothers worked. And then dad would send him out to try to rat out the other brothers when they weren't working. Or if they were far away, he'd send him out to check them out. Not an easy place for Joseph to be, but there he was.

He had a dream one time of eleven sheaves of wheat coming up - that represented his brothers - and he was the other, the twelfth, and they all bowed down to him. And he made the mistake of sharing that dream with his brothers, and they were furious. "We're going to bow down to you.....fat chance, buddy!" But he shared it honestly. It was a dream that he was given. The second dream went even further. There were eleven stars plus the sun and the moon that bowed down to his star. And dad got in the act, and angry, he said, "So your mother and I also, huh, are going to bow down to you?" And the brothers hated him.

Well, all of that's coming true. It wasn't once in a lullaby. It was in the Bible. And it happened in Joseph's life. But probably it didn't come along the way that he imagined. Joseph, as a seventeen-year-old teenager, was sold into slavery by his brothers to a traveling Midianite group who was headed for Egypt. And then he was sold off by them to a eunuch in Pharaoh's palace named Potiphar (an Egyptian guard), and Joseph spent the next ten years of his life serving in a foreign household as a slave. So, by the time he leaves there, he is in his late twenties - maybe twenty-six, twenty-seven years old. And while he was there, we have studied, God blessed Joseph phenomenally so. Everything Joseph put his hand to, the diligence that he showed, the trust that he had in the Lord in the midst of this very unfair situation, brought the blessings of God upon him. And you'll read God was with him, and God blessed everything that he did, and he was promoted there in that place of suffering. And Potiphar saw it, too, and handed his whole household over to Joseph - where he served faithfully. Potiphar's wife had designs on this young man - sexually. She propositioned him more than once. She did more than flirt - she made direct contact and direct suggestions. And as a young man,

he refused, and he refused. And she eventually cornered him one day, and he ran out of the room, and she held his robe and suggested he had tried to rape her. And her husband, we shared last week that he didn't kill Joseph - which would have been the punishment under Egyptian law; but he put him in the king's prison, which was far less severe. So, we think maybe her husband knew a little bit more about his wife than we might think, that he wasn't so sure she was telling the truth. But there wasn't really much that he could do, and so Joseph finds himself in prison, and that's where we find Joseph tonight - in prison. And he is excelling there. No complaints. God, have Your way. And he has been promoted to chief.

In fact, if you'll read from verse 21 through 23 of chapter 39, "But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper." Those are pretty awesome verses. So, what a life this twenty-something man has led. He had gone from the favor of his father and to that place of great blessing in his family with his dad; to slavery at Potiphar's house; to the head of the household; to being a convicted, though innocent, felon in the prison; to now being the chief steward in the prison - who ran the jail. All because God was with him. Three steps forward, two steps back.

Now, the life of Joseph is one that you want to look at closely to see how you might walk with God because in all of these things, God is working in his heart these deep things necessary for what would lie ahead. He wouldn't have been ready for it earlier on, but he is being prepared by it, and you will not find one word of complaint coming from Joseph's mouth. Even though isolation is brought on by suffering, you feel alone in the thing and difficult. There's no support. The pagans, though, the unbelievers, if you will, the idolaters - are all watching him.

I remember, years ago, reading F.B. Meyer's commentary on Genesis. And he said, "I think one of the reasons the Lord allows Christians to suffer is so that the world can see that their God is real." Because they watch to see, and they react differently. And certainly Joseph's faith and trust in God's presence is phenomenal.

So, you and I, our greatest witness to the world is not when we talk gospel but when we live it. And it is most set in contrast when there are reversals in our life - when things don't go the way that we want them to. Everybody's pretty happy when things go well. You know, when things are going your way, and "Oh, praise the Lord! God's good!" Sure He is. Of course He is. Lookit, everything's going well with you. But when you see things turn, and you're not sure why.....when you've beat an addiction, and you're conquering it, and then it rears its ugly head, and you stumble and you fall one time and, "Oh, God. I thought I was done with this!" Now how do you handle it? When the cancer's in remission, and now it's back. When I had a great job, and now I don't have one. When I had a nice home, and now I'm losing it. God is good. Is He? If He is, then you're fine, then you know that, then you've learned and grown into it. But it's how we handle the setbacks that are pretty good signs of spiritual maturity, and there's a watching world who wants to see what we really believe about God.

Everywhere you read of Joseph, everywhere - and they're all very unfair, and they're long in years and time and suffering and aloneness, if you will - you will read what we read here in verses 21 and 23: that the Lord was with him, that He showed him favor, that He gave him mercy, that He prospered whatever he did. But you read that, and you want to say to yourself, "What good is it to be the big shot in jail? To be the big man on campus in prison?" Well, God had plans.

And so tonight, we want to continue our study in the life of Joseph and God's dealings with him as He prepares Joseph for what He's going to use most of his life for - to place himself in a position where he can bring a very small group of men and women, who will be known as the children of Israel and will become a nation and the tribes of Israel, into a place of great prominence in Goshen in Egypt, where they get the best of the land and where God will nurture them for some 430 years by the time that they come out with Moses.

The lessons, though, from Joseph's life are profound in application. He is one of my favorite Bible heroes. I always say to you, "I hate him." I don't really hate him. But I certainly want to respond to circumstances the way he does - to be able to handle setbacks the way he does. Because it seems to me - if anyone had an argument to question the providence and the goodness of God, it would have been Joseph. There's really nothing recorded of his life that's very fair - until he's in his thirties, if you will. "And where has God been for these many years? And why have all of these things happened to me so unfairly? I've so faithfully served. I've

resisted temptation - even when no one was watching. I faithfully stood for You," and yet, day by day by week by month by year - nothing, nothing has gotten better in Joseph's life. And I'm sure that he must, at some point, feel that his life is being wasted away. And for what? "I'm growing old and forgotten in an Egyptian jail." And you might expect to read that from Joseph, but you won't because he is convinced, early on, that God is God despite the obstacles and that God knows what God is doing. He maintains his integrity before the Lord. And from all outward appearances, you would say God has forsaken him. But Joseph lived with the awareness and the consciousness of the fact that God had not forsaken him and that he would serve the Lord faithfully and purposefully and never really stumbled into the why's of his predicament. So, he rested completely.

So, here's Joseph - seventeen, he's sold off into slavery. At twenty-seven, he's accused, unfairly, of raping the wife of the Egyptian guard to whom he had been serving for ten years. And now he'll spend the next three years or so in prison, before the Lord springs him and begins to reveal to him. In fact, in a few weeks we'll get to the three weeks of studies which we will just simply call "God's Plans and Purposes Become Clear - Part 1, 2 and 3" because it takes a long time for Joseph to see it. But, look, Joseph here, by the time he gets out of jail, is thirty years old, and half of his life has been spent as a slave and as a prisoner, and he hasn't done a thing wrong. At least in our eyes, he's been as faithful as any of you would hope to be.

So we read in verse 1 of chapter 40, "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." Now, we don't know what happened that caused this suspicion on Pharaoh's part. Everybody speculates - because they were the butler who tasted the drink, like Nehemiah, or the baker who made the food - that maybe someone had tried to slip some poison in.....but, we don't know. But needless to say, something took place. Someone was guilty. He didn't know who. They were both in prison.

Notice in verse 4, Joseph "served them." He's in charge in the prison. Like I said, not the greatest place to be the big man on campus. But I want you to notice - Joseph served these guys. Wherever you find Joseph, he is serving others. He's

the best slave at Potiphar's. He's the model prisoner in the jail. He's the most compassionate guy. He's concerned with how others feel. When these two men have a dream, he comes in in the morning, and rather than saying, "You know, I've been in here for a year already, and no one's hearing my case. I'm not getting a review." He says, "Oh, you guys look upset. Is everything all right?" He's concerned about others. Most of the time when people suffer, it is usual and common to not be interested in anyone but you because suffering is very self-consuming, isn't it? People say, "How are you doing?" "Oh, I'm glad you asked." And then you say, "Well, I wish I hadn't" because you know what's coming. (Laughing) So, Joseph serves these men and the king and shows great concern for them.

Verse 5, "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." Look at that. "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?'" Now, both of them had dreamed a dream that night. They woke up unable to understand what it meant. It would help you to know that dreams to the Egyptians, like the Babylonians, were big deals because they believed with all of their hearts that the gods spoke to them through dreams. And we know God sometimes does speak to us through dreams. But through their idolatry, they really had nowhere to turn with it, no Bible to compare it to - if you like. So Joseph comes in in the morning, and they're just like - maybe they'd shared it with each other, "I don't know what's going on." And Joseph's such an observant guy. He's concerned for others at a time when he could have lost himself in self-pity. But he doesn't. He gets right involved with them. "Why are you so sad? What are you doing?"

One of the things we have, over the years, found when we deal with folks that come in that are suffering from depression is that one of the consequences of depression is that you constantly are self-evaluating. It's almost like, in a physical sense, you look down at yourself, and then you run into things. And then you wonder why your head hurts. Just look up. Don't run into stuff anymore. But depression does that. It makes you focus on you. That's all you care about, and you start to, "I've never felt like this. I never feel so good." If you're feeling normal, most people don't think about how they feel. They've got other things going on. But depression drives you within. So, what we usually try to get folks

that are depressed that know the Lord to do is to start to serve others. We take them to the hospitals to go visit with the people and pray and to get their eyes off themselves because that usually is the worst place to be. And I find Joseph - he must not have been too depressed because he's interested in other people, you know? He's not overwhelmed by his position. He loves what he's doing. I'm sure that he doesn't know why he's there, but he notices their countenance, he goes in to investigate.

"And they," verse 8, "said 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.' " Not ordering them around as prisoners, just very respectful. "Tell me." And I love Joseph's politeness and the fact that Joseph believes that God can help them. He's a great man of God because he always turns to the Lord in everything. "Hey, look. God interprets dreams, doesn't He? Tell me what they are, please." And by the way, just reading it through, would you have found fault with Joseph if he would have said to you at this point, "Yeah, I used to dream dreams. They don't mean anything. I saw my brothers bowing down, my mom and dad, and look at me now! I've spent ten years as a slave and another year as a prisoner. Yeah, I used to believe in dreams. I don't believe in them anymore." That would be something I would relate to because of what he went through. But he didn't do that. He just said, "God gives dreams." He hadn't lost sight of what God had spoken to him about even though a decade or more has passed. So, here's a guy who's got his eyes on the Lord, believes what God told him, and he says, "Tell me the dream. Let's see what God has to say."

Well, 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. Then 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.' And Joseph said to him, 'This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler.' " So, the words "lift up your head," by the way - verse 13 - is one of those biblical idioms that speaks of being encouraged. I think it's Psalm 3:3, "But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head." It literally means "to be encouraged," like when the kids in the baseball are down on themselves, "Lift up your head. You're gonna be all right!" That's kind of how

that idiom is used. So, the chief butler's dream is positive. "Three days, you'll be back to your old job. All will be well." "All right. I hope you're right."

Well, then we get to verse 14, and Joseph says, " '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.' " See, Joseph wasn't happy here, but he was trusting the Lord. It wasn't easy. He said, " '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.' " "I'm innocent!" It's his only, really, protest. "I don't want to be here. I don't belong here. I've had a lot of bad things - you just tell the Pharaoh when you get out in three days."

Well, "When the chief baker" (who apparently wasn't going to talk but) "saw that the interpretation was good" (so I suspect he was more hesitant, and maybe he was the guilty one, after all), "he said to Joseph," (well, maybe my dream won't turn out to be a nightmare), " '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 of the basket on my head.' So Joseph answered and said, 'This is the interpretation of it: The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.' " Oh. Nightmare on Baker Street. Right? (Laughing) He didn't want to hear this, and I don't doubt that he hoped Joseph was all wet. After all, he was just some guy in prison.

Well, verse 20, "Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Now, Joseph shows great compassion. He allows the Lord to use him to bring meaning to the dreams that these men had dreamed. They come to pass. One gets out. The butler is out, the baker is done. And now Joseph, I am sure if he is twenty-eight years old - young guy - he is, with great anticipation, waiting for word to come of his release. Because certainly, this butler is going to tell everybody the story. "You know, I was there. I had a dream. There was this guy, and exactly what he told me happened." Right? Wouldn't you be anticipating that? And Joseph waited. But here's the deal. God needed Joseph to be there a while longer. So, God had a task

for Joseph in Egypt that Joseph wasn't yet prepared for, and so God allowed this butler to forget Joseph even though it would no doubt have been this extraordinary experience in his life. You would think that anybody he talked to about what had happened in three days, "What's prison like? Have you ever been there? Why, I'd never want to go there again. Who did you meet? Who did you talk to? How did they treat you?" And he could tell the whole story and forget about the dream and the interpretation? And what he had shared when others asked how jail had been, he leaves it out.....but he does.

And for the next two years, verse 1 of chapter 41, Joseph is left in the prison with no hope of a future, no assurance he wouldn't die there. He's left there. It was Einstein who said, "Time is relative," but though I don't have Einstein's brain, I'm pretty sure I could come up with that because it seems to me that there are times in my life when time drags, usually when they are miserable circumstances - like waiting to go to the dentist. (Laughing) I've got to have some dental work in the next couple of weeks - oh, I'm so happy. (Laughing) But if I go on vacation or something, it's like the week goes by doesn't it? You guys all had some time off for Thanksgiving. Don't you feel like that was just like twenty minutes? And then it's gone! So, time is relative. It's relative to what you're doing, isn't it? And I can't believe that Joseph, during this time, wasn't saying, "Where is God? Why, God?" I don't doubt that he prayed every day for deliverance. He was a man of God, and yet, heaven was silent, and his prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears, and nobody responded, and there was no one there to encourage him. He couldn't go to church and hang out with you guys and be encouraged. He was on his own. He was by himself. What a challenging and questioning place to wonder if the fairness and the love of God was for real. I want you to notice this - he can't control his circumstances. They're out of his control. Right? But he can, with God's help and a surrendered heart, control his response to his circumstances. And for the next two years, Joseph serves the Lord. He is kept in that place of leadership, he is depended upon, he does a great job. God greatly blesses him. But you have to know that every time Joseph heard a key in a lock or a door slam, that for the next few weeks, he looked around to find, "Is that the guy that's coming to let me out?" "No!" You know he did that - because he wanted out of there in the worst way. He didn't want to be there.

But the story's not over. I think it's hard to get the full impact of what Joseph was facing because we know the end of the story, and plus we can read three or four chapters in fifteen minutes and skip over the fact that it's been twenty years.

By the time we get to Joseph's brothers' meeting - nearly twenty one years since he's seen them last. We can read it in about fifteen minutes, but it's been year after year after year, and if you shut the book here, you can easily conclude God's not kind. Yet later, when you see the whole picture and your view is clear, then you begin to go, "That was a good idea." I would suggest that's the same thing that's happening in your life. If you do like this, it's hard to see. Right? You can't see what God is doing. And certainly, when your life is finished, and God shows you what He accomplished, you're going to be able to say, "God, You're so wise."

Our problem is that, from the midst of my dilemma or my trial, I don't see the whole picture. It's kind of like the same thing we'll see later with Jacob when the boys return with tales of how mean that ruler in Egypt is, and, "Don't bother coming back for more food unless you bring your youngest brother, Benjamin." And Jacob said to his children, years in, still suffering and grieving; very unhealthy grieving, by the way, Jacob over his son; never got over it, you know? "All things are against me," he said. "All things are against me." That's absolutely wrong, Jacob. Everything's working in your favor, buddy. You're about to see a boy you thought was dead, and you haven't seen him for more than two decades. But he's alive, Jacob. He's alive, and he's coming for you, and you're going to get to see him. But Jacob didn't see that. If you could only see the glory that God has.....If Jacob could have only seen that the famine was there to have Joseph in a position to spare the people and prepare a place and bring his father together, that the future of the nation - of which Jacob was the founder, if you will - was at stake.

I would encourage you that the next time you are tempted to question God and cry out about your difficulty, "All things are against me," just remember that you don't see the big picture. And God works big picture. He works individually, don't get me wrong. He knows exactly what you're going through, and He counts the hairs on your head. That's pretty personal. But He knows that there's a work to be done, and here's Joseph for you again. He rests in that. He absolutely commits himself to that. I would say to you - don't make your judgments about God until all of the facts are in because, if you do, oftentimes the greatest sorrow is having to go back to the Lord and apologize for the things you said about Him along the way. "Oh, Lord, I wish I had trusted in you....now that I see what You're up to." I always like that first part in the book of Job, there in chapter 1:22 - one of the compliments the Lord lays out for Job is that, "In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong." Through all that he was facing. That's a pretty good deal. Look, we may never curse God, but we can often charge him foolishly that, "He doesn't love me.

He's not fair. He can't be trusted." Well, that's only because you don't have all of the information. And if you live like that rather than living with the knowledge of who God is, you'll become cynical and disillusioned, and you'll be a terrible witness, and your light won't shine, and God won't be able to use you because He wants to show Himself through your life. But it requires a willingness to rest in His care and plans.

And Joseph is the epitome of that in his life, and even as you get to chapter 41:1, the very first verse says, "Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years." I mean, that's the implication. Joseph had hoped to get sprung in three days, and I don't know how many weeks he looked over his shoulder, but eventually he quit looking, and he realized this is what God wanted. It is absolutely impossible to understand God's ways. The only thing you can have going for you is that you can be convinced that, in every circumstance, God is at work. Paul spent much of his time unjustly in prisons, but the result was that you have all of these epistles in your Bible. I suspect the way that Paul lived his life, had he not been imprisoned, he wouldn't have stopped to write. He was an "on the go" kind of guy. Right? He would have never written, and yet, I doubt whether Paul - spending fully half of his ministry years in jail - saw that. But the big picture - wow! Right?

So, here Joseph is being prepared in heart and refined by the Lord, broken, learning to live life, knowing it wasn't his own. And the chief butler forgot about him, but God didn't. And two years later, God was ready to move. And now the butler's (all of a sudden!) hazy memory kicks in. Why did God wait so long? I don't know. I don't know. I'll tell you what I do know. I know that God does everything well, and if you'll submit to Him and rejoice in what He's doing at every place and be faithful and diligent, some things just take time. I don't like reading Tozer much. He's a holiness preacher. Every time I read him, no matter how good I'm doing spiritually, I feel like I'm doing horribly by the time I'm done. He just beats you to death. But I remember reading that he said once that he doubted that God could ever bless anyone greatly until He had hurt them deeply. I don't know how well Joseph would have done coming from a spoiled home to second in charge in Egypt. I think he might have been very much the entitled guy. "This is just who I am and what I do. I've already got my multicolored jacket." But through whatever he went through during these many years, twelve years or so, he finds himself broken to the place where God can use him. There's no room to boast now or to be proud. And God has a way of preparing us. So I would say, don't waste the days of

preparation with complaining and frustration. Just bloom where you're put, and wait to see what God's going to do next.

All right, two full years, then verse 1, "Pharaoh had a dream; and behold he stood by the river. Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river. And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke." Burritos? Maybe. Let's see. "He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, it was a dream. Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh."

Now God gives to Pharaoh two dreams that frighten him and for good reason. He's an Egyptian, he places a tremendous amount of weight or impact upon dreams. He doesn't know Almighty God gave him this one, and this was God's way of springing Joseph. But he has a dream. The first one - he sees the river. The river is the Nile. Right? It is the only river in Egypt. It is the longest river in the world. It runs, I think, 1640 miles from Equatorial Africa down to the Mediterranean, where it opens up and fans into this huge, fertile delta that is about fifty miles long - where just everything grows, and you can go years without rain, and there will still be water there. It made Egypt the breadbasket of the world for generations, for centuries, if you will. Cows would stand, historically, in the water up to their necks to beat the heat and the flies - and just eat. It was like they were hanging out in a pretty cool place.

So, here're the dreams. He sees the fat cows, the good-looking cows standing in the water, and then he sees some sickly ones come up. And the sickly ones eat the good cows. Same thing with the grain - fat grain, and then the blighted heads of grain because an east wind, well known in the desert by the way - there are actually records where 60 degree days turn into 115 degree days in forty-five minutes because of these east winds. So, he's aware of what he's talking about. But all of the fledgling crops died. Neither dream was very good. I mean, they both ended badly. Right? There was loss involved in both, and he didn't like what he heard,

and so he wakes up, and he goes to get help. But the magicians, who are pretty powerful servants of Satan, can't help. We say powerful servants of Satan because, in a couple of centuries when Moses shows up and throws his rod down and it becomes a serpent, they were able to magically reproduce that - whether they were just good at sleight of hand or they were just filled with demonic power we don't know. Now, Moses' rod ate all of the serpents because greater is He that is with Moses. But the point is, he had some strong demonic guys around him, yet this dream was from the Lord, and they couldn't speculate or pretend because one of the rules in Egypt was - if your interpretation was wrong, you'd die. And Pharaoh wasn't above putting you to death. So, nobody helps.

Well, of all things, the chief butler wakes up. Apparently he'd been sleeping for two years. Verse 9, "Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying, 'I remember my faults this day.' " Well about time, buddy. " 'When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him.' " Now, the chief butler is spilling his guts while, back in prison, Joseph is just getting up for another day. Right? He's got those marks on the wall. Right? 365, 365 more, 365 more, and stuff like, "I hate that butler." (Laughing) Right? So he's getting up and brushing his teeth and waiting to walk around the yard for an hour because he gets an hour out of his cell, or whatever he gets to do. But what he's not aware of is the fact that this is God's day to bring him to the forefront. He has no idea what's about to happen. He doesn't understand God's plan is beginning to take shape. He doesn't know why he's been allowed to be sold by his brothers or imprisoned or taken as a slave or falsely accused, why all of those years have passed. He knows nothing about all things, indeed, work together for good to those who love the Lord. But Joseph loves the Lord. So you have all of these things going on, and now it was slowly going to become clear.

Verse 14, "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh." Egyptian customs demanded that all men be shaved bald - no beard, no mustache. In fact, all of those Pharaohs glued horsehair onto their chins. Those are fake,

right? Because by Egyptian law you had to be a cue ball - which is absolutely opposed, by the way, to Hebrew practices where the religious men would never shave their beard at all. But, Joseph shaved - no problem. When you're in Egypt, you've got to "Walk like an Egyptian" (Singing...Laughing). You laugh, but you'll remember.

And verse 15 said, "And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.' So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, 'It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.' " Now, just like other men that God so greatly used, Joseph is the perfect example of someone who will not take credit for God's work. Important lesson because sometimes we do see people kind of running around and taking bows for the Lord. Right? Peter, at the healing of the lame man, said, "Why are you looking at us as if somehow we, in our own strength, have made him whole?" Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar pretty much the same thing. "I can't do this, but God - He's the One who interprets dreams." So, make sure, if you want God to use you, that you give credit to the Lord for His work because in so doing, you'll have another opportunity to serve Him. I also love Joseph's very calm and loving heart. I might have expected him to say, "Oh, sure, now you need me! Hey, by the way butler - thanks dude for forgetting me for two years!" Not Joseph. What does Joseph do? He's kind, he turns to the Lord, he turns the attention of the Pharaoh to the Lord and says, "God will answer you. God will speak peace to your life. He can answer. He will help you."

Well, beginning in verse 17, and we'll save time by not reading it again, down through verse 23, Pharaoh describes what we just read of those two dreams that he had. And as with Nebuchadnezzar, later, so with Pharaoh here - God lays out in a dream, before these heathen kings, His plans for the future because He rules even over the government of the wicked. So you Americans who are dissatisfied with your government, know this - God's on the throne. Rest in Him, and serve Him well with all of the freedom you have to preach. Flourish where God put you. Wasting a lot of time complaining. There're people that need to get saved.

So, Pharaoh gets this vision from God - much like Nebuchadnezzar - and tells it to Joseph. Verse 24, " 'So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.' Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do: the seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. And the

seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe. And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.' " So, the Lord lays out the future. Joseph brings the interpretation.

Well, then, Joseph wants to give some godly advice. In touch with the Lord, in control - though he might have been fuming - he says in verse 33, " Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.' " So Joseph is giving some wise counsel in light of God's revelation. And I want you to notice something - Joseph is still serving. Joseph is interested - because God has made something known - that the people don't suffer, that Pharaoh doesn't suffer, that the Egyptians don't starve. His advice is very wise, right? It doesn't appear to be that word from the Lord, so to speak. That was the dream. But it is Joseph the servant, who is not out for himself, he's serving others. So, life's not easy to live by anyone, but sometimes your circumstances make it almost unbearable, and we feel we'll never survive, and we question God's goodness. But look at Joseph. Look at Joseph. He's thirty years old now. He left home at seventeen. It's his first time he got to speak to the guy who's locked him up for the last three years, and he just says, "Oh, the Lord will give you peace. Here's what I think you should do so we can make sure everybody gets fed." And he gives him very wise and godly counsel; not bitter because trials will either make you bitter or will make you better. It will harden your heart, or it will refine you. Joseph was a man who was filled with the Spirit, and you can see the mark of God upon him.

Verse 37 we read, "So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a one as

this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.' And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, 'Bow the knee!' So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.' " So, he chooses Joseph to be second in command of a world kingdom, the Egyptian kingdom. It seems to me it's so different from many today who don't want to hire Christians because they always play the "bro" card - they're not serving, they're expecting favor. I want to put myself in Joseph's shoes, or have you stand there for a minute. In a matter of sixty minutes, he goes from the pit to the pinnacle. From the dungeon to second in command of the world. He runs the kingdom. He has carte blanche. Notice he gets an upgraded wardrobe - Egyptian cotton with "bling." Right? He gets a new chariot with a personalized license plate that says "Number 2." (Laughing) What a change! In a moment. And could he handle it? Yeah. Why? Because he doesn't care. He's just serving the Lord. "God, You do what You want." His heart is to serve God, not to get self-gain.

Verse 45, "And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah." I like Joseph better. It's easier. It means, by the way, "savior of the world." And that's the way that Pharaoh named him. "And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt." So, you read this, and I know there are folks who say, "Well, why did he marry a daughter from the chief priests of the Egyptians?" He had no choice. This was a work of Pharaoh. Some object; I don't think Joseph could object. Here's his heart, though. In the verses that come, he will name his children "forgetting my toil" and "God has made me fruitful in this place." He just thrives where God puts him. So Joseph now comes to power.

Verse 47, "Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields

which surrounded them. Joseph gathered very much gain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable. And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came," (so in the first seven years) "whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him." So, seven years of plenty. There will be one year of famine, as we will continue.

Joseph will, by the end of our chapter, be thirty-eight years old. Seventeen to thirty-eight = twenty-one years passed since he stood before his brothers, and they counted their money, and they watched him being carried off into slavery. But that's going to be for another night.

Verse 51, "Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh;" (Manasseh means "forgotten my toil") " 'For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.' And the name of the second he called Ephraim; 'For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.' " Forgotten my toil - years of suffering, right? - are a distant memory to Joseph. Joseph finds great joy where God plants him and lays any bitterness or anger down so that he might enjoy what God has given to him. He names his son literally "amnesia." "I've forgotten all of the sorrows. I'm just going to rejoice in all that God's doing. Look at the blessings God has brought to me." And he doesn't bear the frustrations of a difficult life to the forefront. How many people do you know that you talk to and they go, "Oh, for years I'll tell you that since I was eight years old." They want to just live their life backwards. Ephraim means "fruitful" because he celebrates God's blessing. He doesn't lament the past. He rejoices in the present. His second son's name is literally "ambrosia." It's a word that means "fruitful." So, Joseph is ruling, rejoicing, worshipping, serving the Lord.

Verse 53, "Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.' " It reminds me of those words that Mary passed on at the wedding feast at Cana when they were out of wine. "You go to Jesus, and whatever He tells you, do."

Well, "The famine was all over the face of the earth," verse 56, "and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain,

because the famine was severe in all lands." So, the stage is now set for God to bring Joseph's family, and the plans of God are about to be revealed in a young man who hasn't really understood, I think, the will of God since he was seventeen years old. He went off to slavery with two dreams.

Knowing God is working with purpose should allow you to do something - rejoice every day. Right? If you know God's in charge, life is an adventure. If you're not sure God is in charge, life is a terror, and you don't want to hear about bad news because you don't want it to come your way, and you live in fear that it might. But if you walk with God, and you know He's in charge, life is a joy. Don't know what God's going to do - it's going to be great! May not like it for a while, but I know it's going to be great. God can handle your Potiphars, can't He? And He can handle the chief butlers who forget about you. And He can handle brutal families. And he can handle difficult circumstances. "All things DO work together for good to those who love God and to those who are the called according to His purpose," (Romans 8:28). And don't forget - His purpose is to conform you. That's what the next verse - Romans 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

So, God's purpose in doing great things in your life is to conform you, mold you, shape you, so that by you and through you, He can then do other things. It doesn't always come easily. Joseph's a pretty good example - it never comes easily. So, I don't know what you're facing today or how bad you hope the next year gets here and forget the old year, but God's been doing good things. God IS doing good things in the life of His people. And we should rest and rejoice in them, don't you think? The world needs to see a church that's on fire for Him - not moved by a world that's just got nothing going for it.

So we'll pick up the story next week - with one of several weeks in a row where we're just going to call them, "The Plans and The Purposes of God Are Being Made Clear." And with each passing chapter, I think we're going to see the Lord do that. We'll do chapter 42 next week, half-way through 44 the following week, all the way to 45 the week after that. I'm pretty sure, then, we'll be at the end of the year, and we'll have Joseph back together with his family.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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