

Genesis (2011) 41A

- Last week we were in the midst of watching Joseph interpreting the dreams of two royal prisoners
 - Joseph was accompanied by the chief cupbearer and chief baker
 - Both men had been accused of something worthy of death, perhaps they were suspected of poisoning the Pharaoh
 - And both were desperate to know their fate
 - As it turns out, the Lord gives each man a dream that foretold their destiny
 - We know that God can work through dreams to reveal things to men
 - And occasionally He will obscure the meaning of dreams so that He can connect the dreamer with an interpreter
 - And of course, the Lord does this so that they might seek out someone to interpret
 - And in this case, the Lord has given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams
 - Interpreting dreams is a unique skill in scripture
 - We only know of two men who have that gift: Joseph and Daniel
 - Many people can interpret their own dreams, as God permits
 - Or at least they think they can
 - But interpretations don't always turn out the way we expect or prefer...

There was an international incident recently (in 2013) when the president of Iran visited the United Nations in New York to give a speech. Before he was scheduled to speak, the president met with our US ambassador to the United Nations and told her:

"I had this incredible dream last night. I could see all of America, and it was beautiful and on top of every building, there was a flag. And on every flag there was writing, and the writing said: 'Allah is God, God is Allah.'"

The ambassador replied: "You know, Mr. President, that is remarkable, because last night I had a dream too. I could see all of Tehran, and it was more beautiful than ever, and on every building there was a flag. And every flag had something written on it as well."

The Iranian president asked, "So what was written on the flags?"

The ambassador replied: "I really don't know. I can't read Hebrew!"

- So an interpretation of our dreams may not be as we hoped
 - And such was the case for the second prisoner, the baker

[Gen. 40:16](#) When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; [Gen. 40:17](#) and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

[Gen. 40:18](#) Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;

[Gen. 40:19](#) within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

[Gen. 40:20](#) Thus it came about 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 cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

[Gen. 40:21](#) He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand;

[Gen. 40:22](#) but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

[Gen. 40:23](#) Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

- Last week we learned that the cupbearer's dream foretold his release and restoration to serving Pharaoh
 - This gave Joseph cause to ask the cupbearer to remember Joseph
 - Joseph's hope was that the cupbearer could bring Joseph's case before the Pharaoh and win his release
 - But there was still the matter of the baker's dream
 - As we read, the baker's dream foretells a very different, and no doubt disappointing, outcome
 - The baker would not be released
 - The baker's dream has birds devouring bread even before it reached Pharaoh

- Birds were viewed as spiritual creatures by Egyptians, and they were protected
- So they were frequent nuisances and scenes like the one in the bakers dream would have been common
- The baker's responsibility was to keep the food protected and undefiled until it reached Pharaoh
- His failure to keep the food safe may have been the issue which landed him in jail to begin with
- So by that imagery, Joseph confirms this will be his undoing
 - He will be hanged and impaled on a tree to be eaten by birds
 - Egyptians thought this a fate worse than death since the soul could not proceed to the after life
- There is an interesting play on words in Joseph's statements to the two men
 - In the case of the cupbearer, Joseph said the Pharaoh would "lift up" the man's head
 - Meaning, he would return to his high position of power
 - But in the case of the baker, Joseph says the Pharaoh will "lift his head up" in the sense of taking his head off
 - This is a reference to the man's head being removed by the hanging
- Thus we learn an important lesson:
 - The baker should have kept his dream on a "knead the dough" basis
 - And I'm sure Joseph's interpretation got a rise out of the baker
 - And he probably thought it was half-baked
- If you remember from last week, I alluded to a picture of Christ found in this passage of Joseph in the prison with these two men
 - The picture began with the observation that these days in the prison represent the lowest point in Joseph's life

- This is the greatest test Joseph will face
- And this is also the trial that proved Joseph's worthiness to be elevated
- And then compare this period in Joseph's life to the time in Jesus' life when He hung on the cross and went to the grave
 - Clearly, this was Jesus' darkest moments
 - The point at which Jesus accepted the sin of the world upon His shoulders
 - He felt the sting of death in a most cruel way
 - And He suffered the separation from the Father
- And if you remember that moment on the cross, Jesus wasn't alone
 - On either side of Him were two other condemned men
 - The two thieves who happened to find themselves crucified on either side of the Lord of the Universe
 - These two men are represented prophetically by the baker and the cupbearer
- Those two thieves demonstrated two very different responses to Jesus and His predicament on that Roman cross
 - The first thief mocked Jesus
 - He challenged Jesus that if He were truly the Messiah, then He should get Himself off the cross
 - How could Jesus claim to save Israel if He couldn't even save Himself
 - Without a doubt, this man was a man who held no faith in Jesus
 - And though he was only hours away from his own death, nevertheless he still fought against the inevitable
 - He was about to face judgment for sin
 - And he had no hope, no solution, no rescue
 - He was as condemned in the spirit as he was in his flesh

- But then we have the second thief crucified on Jesus' other side
 - This thief objects to the first thief's statements
 - He comes to Jesus' defense
 - Listen to the exchange that takes place

[Luke 23:39](#) One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

[Luke 23:40](#) But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

[Luke 23:41](#) "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

[Luke 23:42](#) And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

[Luke 23:43](#) And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

- The second thief is destined to die just as assuredly as that first thief and Jesus Himself, for that matter
 - But in the face of death, the man seeks a source of hope
 - He turns to Jesus and in faith seeks Jesus' mercy while acknowledging Jesus' lordship as Messiah
 - He declares that Jesus will one day come into His kingdom
 - And this man seeks to be there on that future day
 - In a few words, the man expresses the essence of the Gospel
 - That Jesus was the Messiah
 - That He would be resurrected following His death
 - That He will return to rule a kingdom
 - And that He offers that kingdom to all who seek it from Him in faith
 - As Paul said:

[Rom. 10:9](#) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- What's even more remarkable is this thief was willing to acknowledge this truth while staring into Jesus' blood soaked eyes as He hung next to him on a cross
 - How much faith did it take to believe the claims of Jesus knowing He was soon to die Himself?
 - To accept that the One whose own body is soon to fail is the same One Who can save this thief from hell
- So in the story of Joseph we also find two men on either side of Joseph, in a sense
 - Each had a moment to seek an answer from him concerning their future
 - One learns that he will be restored and will have his life returned to him, in a sense
 - Furthermore, that man is asked to remember Joseph before Pharaoh
 - But the second man faces a very different outcome
 - He is set to lose his life
 - He has no more to say concerning Joseph
 - The connection is clear to see
 - The cupbearer is a picture of that believing thief
 - While the baker is the picture of the unbelieving thief who had no hope after his encounter with Jesus
- Moving into Chapter 41, we discover that Joseph isn't finished interpreting dreams

[Gen. 41:1](#) Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile.

[Gen. 41:2](#) And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass.

[Gen. 41:3](#) Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile.

[Gen. 41:4](#) The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

[Gen. 41:5](#) He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good.

[Gen. 41:6](#) Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them.

[Gen. 41:7](#) The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.

[Gen. 41:8](#) Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so 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 to Pharaoh.

- The Pharaoh of Egypt receives a dream from God, designed to be unexplainable except by Joseph
 - We know the Lord is working in all these circumstances, both in the dreams in the prison and now with Pharaoh
 - Joseph proves himself before the cupbearer while he sat in prison
 - And this gives opportunity for the cupbearer to learn of Joseph's abilities and apply that knowledge at a later time
 - And now that later time has come, when the Lord gives Pharaoh a dream no one can interpret
 - But first, did you notice once again that it required two more years before the opportunity arrived for Joseph?
 - I won't repeat the lessons on this point that we learned last week except to simply reiterate the main point
 - God's movement in our lives often takes much longer than we expect and desire
 - But that waiting is a period of testing and maturing that brings spiritual benefit that can't be accomplished any other way
 - So in His wisdom, the Lord determined that Joseph needed to spend two more years in prison after meeting the cupbearer
 - God had laid the seeds for Joseph's elevation, yet those seeds required time to grow and produce fruit
 - So it is in the way God uses our trials, to face them with patience, as James teaches

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
[James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.
[James 1:4](#) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- The Pharaoh's dream has two versions, and this is a pattern worth noting by itself
 - The dreams that Joseph interpreted from the cupbearer and the baker also had two version or two outcomes
 - This is a distinct pattern throughout the story of Joseph
 - It is a story with a recurring theme of “pairs”
 - For example, Joseph had two versions of the dream for his family and parents
 - The wheat and the celestial objects
 - He is betrayed twice with his garments
 - Joseph interpreted two dreams in prison
 - Joseph is in prison two years before hearing Pharaoh's dream
 - The Pharaoh had two dreams with different images
 - Cows and stalks of grain
 - There will be two seven year periods in Egypt
 - Later, we'll see Jacob's family take two trips to Egypt during the famine and appear before Joseph twice
 - Why does the story of Joseph often revolve around pairs in this unique way?
 - Well, here again, we find a subtle but unmistakable picture of Christ in the life and story of Jesus
 - And so through the pairs in Joseph's story we find a foreshadowing of an important aspect of the ministry of Christ
 - The Messiah's role is a two-fold role
 - First, Jesus is our perfect sacrifice paying a price for sin – a price we couldn't pay ourselves and live

- Secondly, the Lord will triumph over sin and death and come in glory to reign as King of the world
 - Jesus has a first coming to save men from their sin
 - And He has a second coming to judge and reign
 - He is the Lamb of God and the Righteous King
 - And so the pairs in Joseph's story is leading us to understand that Christ's ministry is split into two parts as well
- In these two dreams, God uses symbols that held special importance to Egyptians and to Pharaoh
 - The dream included the Nile, cows and grain
 - The Egyptians associated the Nile with life
 - The water from that river made the difference between a hopeless desert and a lush oasis
 - So watching fat cows emerge from the river would have been especially significant to the Pharaoh
 - Cows were the symbol of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility
 - So this dream was designed to stir Pharaoh's heart concerning the future prosperity of his kingdom
 - And the stalks of wheat were a national symbol for Egypt, which was the grain basket of the ancient world
 - As Pharaoh experienced the dreams, he watched the seven ugly lean cows come out of the river
 - The scene must have become disturbing and bazaar
 - And then the lean cows consume the fat ones
 - The word for eat is *akal* which means chewed, a strange scene no doubt
 - And then in the second dream, he sees a similar parallelism, with one set of stalks, fat and ready to eat, with another lean and inedible
 - Even stranger than the cows, here the stalks eat each other
 - The word for eat here, *bala*, means swallow

- I don't know about you, but I usually don't remember my dreams very well
 - It takes a pretty special dream to stick in my mind 10 minutes, much less the next day
 - But in Pharaoh's case, each of these dreams stick out in a profound way
 - He is disturbed to the point of seeking out an answer
 - It's as if life can't go forward for the man until he finds an answer to the questions posed by his dreams
 - In fact, throughout the Bible, when God gives a man a dream, it will leave a profound and lasting impression like with Pharaoh
 - Men remember it and ponder it
 - They search for answers
 - And of course, this is God's purpose in His revelations to men, regardless of the form
 - The Lord doesn't reveal Himself to sinful flesh for nothing
 - His purpose is always to cause fallen men to seek for Him
 - But that seeking always begins with God making a revelation of Himself to men first
 - We cannot seek what we do not know
 - Nor can we find what we are not seeking
 - Pharaoh wasn't seeking for Joseph, much less for the God of Joseph
 - But by this revelation of God, Pharaoh will have cause to seek
 - And by the Lord's provision in Joseph, sitting in prison, the Pharaoh will have cause to find what he seeks
- Praise the Lord that He is a God Who speaks, Who reveals Himself, and Who allows Himself to be found by sinful men!