

Royal Dreams and Royal Storehouses

Life sometimes has its up and its downs. Often these are gradual up-swings followed by little dips—it's the ebb and flow of life, like the tides of the sea. But Joseph's life didn't follow a gentle ebb and flow pattern—and sometimes our lives don't either. His life was an experience of high-highs and low-lows. From being the apple of his father's eye and wearing a colorful coat, to being thrown into the bottom of a pit and then sold into slavery. From becoming the most powerful man in the household of Potiphar, to being thrown into prison for a crime that he didn't commit. And now, as we continue along with the story of Joseph, we are about to see another of one of those big changes in his life—this one will be a rapid climb to becoming one of the most powerful men in the Egyptian empire.

When we last saw Joseph, he had interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and his baker, and both dreams came true exactly the way he had predicted that they would. And the cupbearer's dream had the cupbearer returning to his position in Pharaoh's court where Joseph had asked him to put in a good word with the king to have him released from prison. Joseph had eased the cupbearer's mind by interpreting his dream, but the cupbearer completely forgot about Joseph once he returned to Pharaoh's favor. And now two years had passed, and Joseph was still in that prison. Apparently, there were no other members of Pharaoh's court there in that prison who were in need of a little dream interpretation. And while that was the case in prison, it was not the case in the king's court because Pharaoh himself had now had two dreams that were deeply troubling to him. But no one in the upper levels of the Egyptian government would even venture a guess as to what these dreams meant.

Genesis Chapter 41 gives a detailed account of what was going on with these two dreams. In the first one, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing along the shore of the Nile River when all of a sudden he noticed seven cows coming up out of the water. We sometimes think that this would have been something very startling to see. But, if you were an Egyptian living in the vicinity of the Nile River, it would not have been unusual at all. In fact, it would probably have been something that you would observe almost any day because the cattle loved to graze along the edge of the Nile. And they'd frequently walk out into the river and almost submerge themselves in the water to cool off during the hot summer season to avoid the heat and the insects. It's something that we see cows doing in ponds around here all the time during July and August. So at this point in the dream, Pharaoh is just standing there watching these seven cows that were unusually fat and sleek. And then, the really weird part of the dream takes place. While these seven fat cows are just standing there minding their own business,

up come seven more cows out of the Nile heading straight for them. Now this second bunch of cows didn't look anything at all like the first group. No, they were skinny and poor. If you tried to sell these last seven cows at Madison or Orange, well you wouldn't have had much money to show for it because they looked like they were starving. And I guess that they must have been starving—so starving, in fact, that they walked up to those seven other fat cows and they ate them right up. And Pharaoh's jaw must have dropped when this happened because he'd never seen anything like this before in his life—not even in a dream. And this greatly upset Pharaoh. I guess he was afraid that he might be the next thing on those hungry cows' menu, so he immediately woke himself up.

But you know how it can be with bad dreams. No sooner than you awake from one, you doze off into another one, and that is exactly what happened to Pharaoh. Only this time, instead of dreaming about livestock, he dreamed about crop production. In this second dream, seven heads of grain sprang up. It doesn't say what kinds of grain—wheat or corn—but it was probably heads of corn.¹ Now these seven heads of corn were really something to see. They were healthy, unblemished, the shucks were just as green as could be and the kernels were big and golden-yellow. If Pharaoh had been in a 4-H club, he could have took them to the Egyptian State Fair and won blue ribbons with this corn. They were so pleasant to look at the Pharaoh was now feeling a little bit better about things. And suddenly, without warning, up shot another seven heads of corn. But these were not so pleasant to gaze upon. They were very thin ears and were all dried up by the east wind coming in from the desert.² And lo and behold, just as it was with the cows, these thin ears of corn bent over the healthy ones and just ate them right up—like something you'd see in a Halloween horror movie. And Pharaoh was just as upset by this dream as he was by the first one.

In Genesis 41, it tells us what happened next: ⁸ In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. ⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. ¹² Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. ¹³ And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged." ¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. [And at this point, Pharaoh describes to Joseph exactly what had occurred in both of these dreams.] ²⁵ Then Joseph said to

Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream.²⁷ The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.²⁸ “It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁹ Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt,³⁰ but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.³¹ The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe.³² The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. Genesis 41:8-14, 25-32 (NIV)

But note that Joseph not only interpreted the dreams, he went further and shared with Pharaoh his own remarkable administrative abilities—abilities that were surely a gift from God. Joseph quickly devised a plan that would save the people from starving once those famine years came around. So he turned to Pharaoh and said: ³³ “My suggestion is that you find the wisest man in Egypt and put him in charge of administering a nationwide farm program.³⁴ Let Pharaoh divide Egypt into five administrative districts,³⁵ and let the officials of these districts gather into the royal storehouses all the excess crops of the next seven years,³⁶ so that there will be enough to eat when the seven years of famine come. Otherwise, disaster will surely strike.” Genesis 41:33-36 (TLB) Pharaoh liked what Joseph suggested and so we once again see his station in life improving very rapidly as Pharaoh appoints him to head up this disaster relief program in anticipation of the coming famine years. And God had laid the ground work for all of this to take place—all in God’s good time and according to God’s plan.

Now, you might think that this story is about Joseph—which it is. But, the Old Testament is more than a collection of stories about the great people of God from the ancient past. The Old Testament, and the New, are ultimately about Jesus Christ. There is just so much that see can see in this portion of Scripture that points us toward Jesus Christ and even tells us something about what it means to be a Christian in the world in which we live.

STORING UP “GOOD” WORKS: First, that reference to the grain being stored-up in the royal storehouses is instructive. By storing this grain from one year to the next, the storehouses would available to save the people from death by starvation. A lot of people think in these same terms when it comes to their personal salvation—the salvation that comes into eternal play once that person dies. If you were to do roving interviews of the average person on the street and asked them if they expected to go to heaven when they die, many would probably answer with a tentative, “I guess so.” And if you

pressed them a little and asked why they thought that was true, it is likely that the answer would entail some round about explanation that they have done more “good things” in their lives than “bad things.” And in their minds, if over the course of their lifetimes the “good things” outweigh the “bad ones”, then in all fairness they should be allowed to enter into heaven. And they will usually cap this off by telling you that they are “just as good as most people”—as if that would further commend them to enter into heaven. And so, they look at life like it’s some kind of “royal storehouse”—like the one in Joseph’s story. And, if they can store up enough “good grain” in the form of good works, they’ll defeat death in the eternal sense and be granted eternal life. The sad thing is that some people in the Church today have that same mistaken idea. But God’s Word teaches us differently. In his letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul explains: ⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift (HCSB). ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. (NLT) Ephesians 2:8-9 You can’t save yourself no matter how many good things you do—your royal storehouse might be bursting over with good works, but none of that matters one little bit. Unless you believe in your heart that Jesus is the Lord of your life, and live your life in obedience to your faith in Him, all that stored up grain in your royal storehouse is going to do nothing more than rot—and unfortunately, your soul along with it.

PEOPLE SEEING JESUS IN YOU: The second thing that comes out clearly in this story is that our character as Christians matters because the world is watching—watching every step that you take, every move that you make. That’s the way it was with Joseph as he stood before Pharaoh interpreting his dreams. Pharaoh could see in Joseph something special—not only his God-given talent for interpreting dreams, but also his faith in God by his witness in giving credit to God. In addition to that, Pharaoh was probably astute enough to recognize Joseph’s loving and forgiving nature. He was not one of those vengeful people who might have pointed to the cupbearer and demand that he be punished for forgetting Joseph for those two long years without asking Pharaoh to consider releasing him. In appointing him as a chief administer, Pharaoh could see that he needed more people who were like Joseph in character on spiritual commitment.

Have you ever wondered what other people around you think when they see the things you do? Can they see Jesus in you? If not—what then do they see? The pastor and Christian writer, James Montgomery Boice, in considering Joseph’s character, wrote: “I wonder if people see that kind of character in us and if they recognize that it is God who has given it to us. The only way we will ever have that character (and the only way that others will ever see it) is if we have our eyes on God in all things.”³

Boice goes on to explain that when we fail to see circumstances with God's eyes, we certainly offer a very bad impression to others. For example, during bad times of trials and adversity, if we see things apart from God, all we do is complain and blame the world for being unjust. On the other hand, in good times of prosperity, all we tend to do is become prideful and somehow believe that we, solely through our own efforts have brought about such good things. Those who may be looking on will deem us to be unpleasant whiners in the first case; and arrogant snobs in the second. But if we keep our eyes focused upon God and trust Him, we will see that he uses all things—the good things and the bad ones—to work good for those who love Him.⁴ Having our eyes, our minds, our thoughts, our goals on Jesus Christ matters. The reason it matter is that then others can then begin to see Jesus in us.

The final thing that we can glean from this part of Joseph's story is one of the most important. Joseph had warned everyone about what God intended by the Pharaoh's dreams—God intended to give the people time to prepare for the future before it was too late. Yet, as time went on, some failed to prepare and they were forced to turn to the king for food so they would not starve. And so Pharaoh told them that if they wanted to be saved they needed to go to see Joseph and do exactly what he told them to do.⁵ That's pretty much the state of affairs today with our own survival threatened in so many way: By the interactions between a "rocket man" in North Korea and a President in the White House whose Twittering could spark World War III, or by such headlines as that appearing in Time magazines reading "Climate Change Could Cause the Next Great Famine."⁶ Nuclear war, world-wide famine, mounting natural disasters from hurricanes, to earthquakes to wild fires—all these terrible things remind us that we live in a world that has forsaken God—and with that comes mounting misery and hopelessness for many. But we do have hope just the same—a very certain hope. Today the world needs to take a tip from Pharaoh—just as he told the starving people of his day to "go to Joseph," we as Christians have a duty to point those who are starving spiritually to "go to Jesus." Jesus will comfort them and assure them, just as he will assure and comfort you. Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:35 (NIV)

At the very end of Genesis 41, it tells us that "the famine was severe in all the world."⁷ That famine never ends for those who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Maybe you are living in famine today. If not you, then perhaps a family member or friend is starving in such a famine. There is no other answer, no other solution, no other hunger relief program—there is only one way to relieve that kind of famine. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 (NKJV) If you are hungry—experiencing a famine in your life, there is only one place that you can go for help: "Go to Jesus!" And when you go to Him, there is only one thing that

you can do—you must do exactly what He tells you to do.⁸ Jesus said: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16 (NKJV) If you want to live and not starve, that’s really all you have to do—believe in Him, do what He says.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2017
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¹ *The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Genesis II*, (Chattanooga: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "E. Joseph Rose to Power in Egypt: The Power of God to Work Things Out For His Servant, the Believer, 41:1-57".

² Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *NIV Study Bible*, 2008 Update ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 41".

³ James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – Genesis, Volume 3: Living by Faith (Genesis 37-50)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 968.

⁴ Romans 8:28 (NIV) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

⁵ Genesis 41:55 (HCSB) Extreme hunger came to all the land of Egypt, and the people cried out to Pharaoh for food. Pharaoh told all Egypt, "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Bryan Walsh, "Climate Change Could Cause the Next Great Famine," Time, March 17, 2014. <http://time.com/27201/climate-change-could-cause-the-next-great-famine>.

⁷ Genesis 41:57 (NIV) And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world.

⁸ Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – Genesis, Volume 3: Living by Faith (Genesis 37-50)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 975.