

I Dream of Joseph Genesis 41

Well Friends, today we come to the defining chapter of Joseph's story, when he finally catches his big break, when things finally turn around for him, where all the injustice and suffering that he's endured finally pay off, and where, quite literally, his dreams are about to come true.

Remember those dreams he had as a teenager – where he saw his brothers' sheaves of wheat bowing down to his, where he saw the sun and moon and the stars bowing down to him?

So in this chapter, as Joseph is appointed as the Grand Vizier over all of Egypt – those dreams were becoming a reality.

And really friends, isn't that what makes the story of Joseph so appealing to us? It's a story where dreams come true - and truth be told friends, we are suckers for these kinds of stories, right?

We love the classic rags to riches tales; from the children's fairy tale Cinderella and Aladdin, to the blockbuster movie Pretty Woman, all the way to current Reality TV contests like American Idol or America's Got Talent.

The hero of the story is subjected to undeserved hardship and injustice, but they refuse to become bitter or spiteful and they persevere against all odds – and eventually they catch their big break and are rewarded with success, prosperity, fame, fortune and all the good things in life.

And we love these kinds of stories because they give us hope. They help us believe that if we persevere when times are tough, when we face injustice, when life is hard – eventually we will be rewarded with what we deserve for having endured all of that.

Eventually our dreams will come true – just like they did for Joseph.

Which is what we saw happen today, right?

After last week's crushing blow of having been forgotten by Pharaoh's Cupbearer, Joseph endures another two years of waiting, wondering if his situation has been brought to Pharaoh's attention, and finally it is!

So Joseph is summoned to appear before Pharaoh, to do for the King what he had previously done for the Cupbearer- interpret a dream.

This is it – this is the moment where everything changes for Joseph – he is center stage, the spotlight is on him, the eyes of Egypt's most important people are on him, Pharaoh's eyes are on him, and the question on everyone's mind is "can this Hebrew prison slave live up to his billing?"

And friends, we tend to be so caught up in the rags to riches storyline that it's easy to miss what Joseph says next.

"I cannot do it" Joseph replies to Pharaoh. (vs. 16)

And with that admission to the Pharaoh and his court Joseph puts a screeching halt on the rags to riches storyline that we tend to read into this chapter of his life.

"I cannot do it.... but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" he says.

In this answer friends, we see that Joseph knows it is not about him – it is about God and God's plans.

We see that the two years Joseph has spent waiting in prison, waiting for God to act on His good pleasure and timing have shifted his focus away from himself, and on to God.

Friends this moment in the life of Joseph is not the pivotal moment where the rags become riches, but a Kairos moment – pregnant with the intention of revealing more of God's power and abilities, and his plans to fulfil His promises... and ultimately, to foreshadow how He will bring about His Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

That's the point behind Pharaoh's dream. Yes, the details of the dream are about seven years of plenty and seven years of famine – but as Joseph says *“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.”* (vs. 32)

God is about to act in a significant way friends, and He is making it known so that the people who are going to be affected by His actions have the opportunity to respond in the appropriate manner.

In this case God is going to follow seven years of incredible blessings with seven years of devastating famine – *“So best prepare yourselves!”* says Joseph.

Now we might think this is a bit high handed and arbitrary of God to decide to inflict famine on Egypt and the surrounding countries, but friends – by now we should know that God does nothing on a whim, and that everything He decrees must occur – happens with a purpose and leads towards the fulfillment of His promises.

And, God always provides grace and mercy – to ease the hardship through which his purposes must come about in a fallen world.

In this case, God has warned Pharaoh that he is going to send a severe famine, and we can see this warning as an act of kindness because it allows Pharaoh to get ready to face the famine.

But if Pharaoh doesn't know what to do – then this courtesy tip from God is only a bad omen that will produce fear and anxiety about what is going to happen.

So God also provides the wisdom needed to know how to prepare for this famine.

As God speaks through Joseph to reveal the meaning of the dream, God continues to speak through Joseph to instruct Pharaoh on how to respond to God's revelation.

Friends remember this – the Word of God warns, but at the same time it provides and prepares us to respond to God’s warning.

So Joseph says *“Let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance... so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”* (vs 33-36)

And Pharaoh knows that this is God speaking to him through Joseph because he says *“Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.”*(vs. 39) and Pharaoh decides right then and there to put Joseph in charge of administering the whole plan.

However, before we get too excited that Joseph has been made the second in command over all of Egypt as the representative of the King – we should recognize the fact the God has used him as a Prophet.

It is because God exalts Joseph as a Prophet, and has him speak on His behalf, that Pharaoh bestows all his Kingly authority and power on him.

But prophetic wisdom and insight, kingly authority and power will only go so far in getting this job done. Joseph is a foreigner, a prison slave, and has no official social status which would allow him to execute his duties, not to mention he would lack credibility among the nobility and the common people of Egypt.

So, Pharaoh gives Joseph a wife, the daughter of an Egyptian Priest. Through marrying her, Joseph becomes one of the Egyptians, legally gaining social status as part of the Priestly class of Egypt, and now he will be fully recognized and accepted by the Egyptians as one of their own.

And so, as the text says in vs. 46 *“Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*

Friends this certainly is the defining chapter in Joseph's story, because he is transformed from someone who speaks for himself to someone who speaks for God – a prophet, from someone who has no power to having kingly power and authority, and from having slave status to having priestly status.

In this Kairos moment, God has made Joseph prophet, king and priest, to carry out God's plan and provide salvation from the famine to all of Egypt and the surrounding nations – what a blessing Joseph is!

And I hope you are hearing echoes of the promise God made to Abraham being partially fulfilling in this... *“and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you!”* (Gen 12:3)

And at the same time, in this Kairos moment, God is foreshadowing the way in which He will bring about the ultimate fulfilment of His promise to Abraham - in Jesus Christ.

Joseph speaking as a prophet foreshadows how God will speak the ultimate Word to us in Jesus Christ – the very Word of God become flesh – and telling us what God is doing in our world and revealing to us how we must respond.

As Hebrews 1:1-2 says *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”*

And both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark record Jesus as beginning his ministry after his baptism by proclaiming *“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

The very Word of God made flesh is warning people that God is about to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth in a new way, and that the appropriate response is to repent and believe the good news!

So, just as it did through Joseph, we see that the Word of God through Christ warns and provides and prepares.

And Joseph's Priestly identity by which he essentially becomes one of the Egyptians, through a woman, in order to oversee the distribution of grain foreshadows Jesus' priestly role, in which he takes on our humanity, also through a woman, in order to give us his body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to nourish us spiritually.

As Hebrews 2:16-17 says *"For surely it is not angels he [Jesus] helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."*

And friends, we begin to better understand Jesus priestly role for us as we see the Egyptians turning to Joseph, who dispensed the food which they needed to survive and live and suddenly Jesus words in John 6:51 take on a whole new depth of meaning and significance for us.

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Friends, just as Joseph was the only one who could give out life during the famine, Jesus our priest gives us himself to be our life.

So we should echo Peter's answer to Jesus in John 6: 68-69 where he confesses *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." Who else can we turn to, who else has the words of life!"*

There is no other name under heaven by which we are saved friends!

And finally, Joseph being raised up out of prison and exalted by Pharaoh and foreshadows God's resurrecting Jesus Christ and exalting him, just as it is described in Philipians 2:9-10 *"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him*

the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..."

So, as Joseph rode around in Pharaoh's chariot and the people cried out "bow down, bow down" it foreshadows how people will bow down in worship to the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ.

And when Pharaoh gives Joseph all his kingly authority and power it foreshadows our Lord's words in Matthew 28:18 that *"all authority in heaven and on earth has been given"* to him, just before He ascended into to heaven.

And as Joseph's royal authority and power enabled him to collect a portion of the harvest during the years of plenty, this foreshadows the way in which Jesus will use his royal authority and power when He returns to earth to bring and establish the Kingdom of Heaven – described in Revelation 14:14-16 in harvesting terms.

"I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested."

Joseph's royal authority and power in the Kingdom of Egypt foreshadow Jesus' authority and power as the King - of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Joseph as prophet, priest and king and Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King... and friends, even though it's not about us – it's about God – if we get that, we'll understand that God calls us, through Jesus Christ, to become Prophets, Priests and Kings as well.

We can see in this chapter that this was God's intention for Joseph, and by doing this he was moving the pieces of his plan

to fulfill his promise to Abraham into place – which through Jesus extends to us...

So, to continue to bring in his promise to Abraham to complete fulfillment in Christ – as Paul explains in Romans 11:25 *“Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.”* - God intends for us to become prophets, priests and kings as well.

And this isn't just me trying to be clever with finding an application for the message.

God communicated this intention of his long ago - through the prophet Joel *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy...”* (2:29)

And the apostle Paul had this to say about Christians being Prophets *“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.”* (1 Cor 14:1)

And this about Christians being Kings *“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”* (Eph 2:6)

And the Apostle Peter mentions all three *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...”* (1 Peter 2:9)

So friends, the next time you read or watch this defining chapter in Joseph's story – my prayer is that it will draw you in and grab you - not because it bears a similarity to those rags to riches stories which give us hope that dreams can come true – but because in Joseph's story, we are pointed to Christ and Christ has come for us and in Christ...

God's dreams for us are coming true, and we are being drawn in to the dreams that God gives to us.

That we long to speak on God's behalf to others, to tell them what God is doing and how they can respond...

That we dream of the day when people know that Christ is present among them – through us,

That we can actually see ourselves in our everyday lives as Kings and Queens, bringing the rule of our High King Lord Jesus into our homes, schools, workplaces.

That we start to act and bring justice and righteousness into our communities and cities and we use the power and authority given to us to set people free from sin, sickness, disease, and the lies of the devil.

Prophets priests and Kings friends... working with God to bring his promise to Abraham to complete fulfilment – so that it becomes more and more true that all nations will be blessed.

This isn't just the defining moment in Joseph's story friends – it's the defining moment in our story as well.

Are you ready to enter into the service of the High King and go out into the land, into the community that God has put us in

charge of as Prophets, Priests and Kings, to speak and minister and reign?

Friends may it be said of us – who else would do it, who else has the Spirit of God working in them. Amen?

Let's Pray