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FROM THE PRISON TO THE PALACE: BEING READY FOR GOD'S USE (Genesis 41:1-40)

Joseph spent two years languishing in prison after being falsely accused of rape. He helped some fellow inmates when God allowed him to interpret their dreams, but he was still forgotten after their release. That's what brings us to chapter 41 of Genesis.

GOD CREATES OPPORTUNITY

The roller coaster of Joseph's life was about to go on the upswing again. After his brothers had sold him into slavery, he ended up in Egypt only to distinguish himself to his employer and run his household. Then his boss's wife tried to seduce him, but when he refused, she accused him of attacking her, so he was thrown into prison. After two years of wondering and waiting, God created an opportunity.

*Genesis 41:1, 8 – After two whole years, **Pharaoh dreamed...** So in the morning **his spirit was troubled and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.***

God is the Expert at bringing a need to a place where an answer lives. God will often link a needy person with a resourceful person. God excels at creating a space in time for a heavenly encounter to occur. May we always be on the watch for "God moments." They are all around us if we just look for them. Maybe you are the answer God wants to use in the life of a person in need. When that opportunity comes, we should be ready to serve and willing to meet the need.

GOD SOLVES UNCERTAINTY

Pharaoh's dream confused him. It was actually in two parts: seven fat cows that were eaten by seven emaciated cows and seven healthy ears of wheat eaten by seven blighted ears. He had no idea what it could mean and the uncertainty bothered him greatly.

The unknown is not a friend we like to spend time with. The pain of uncertainty brings fear and dread to our thinking. But God is not a God of confusion. In fact, his ways as he reveals in Scripture give us a solid blueprint for living in clarity, certainty, and hope. This doesn't mean that we will always understand why he ordains certain things for our lives, but we can have confidence knowing that loving and obeying him will give us purpose and satisfaction to where he is leading.

*Psalm 16:11 - **You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.***

GOD'S WISDOM IS NOT LIMITED

This passage tells us that Pharaoh sent first for his wise men and magicians to help him with his dilemma. These were men who had some ability to use dark arts to create illusions but had no ultimate power to control natural processes. Their power only depended on human wisdom and in this case proved useless to help interpret Pharaoh's disturbing dream.

The Bible is filled with teaching contrasting human and divine wisdom. This is the struggle we all face as we deal with the challenges in our lives – to whom will we turn to provide the answers needed to truly handle the problems of life? We are tempted to rely on our own thinking or the thinking of other people to give us direction in times of decision, but the wisdom that comes from God as revealed in his Word points us in the way to lasting and successful conclusions.

*1 Corinthians 1:19, 20 - For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?***

We have tried the wisdom of the world and it has left us rudderless and without ultimate answers. Evil does not need a reason, it just needs an opportunity. Why does it feel as if the world is spinning out of control? We have rejected God. He sets for all men a structure of life. The closer we are to that, the better society functions. The farther away, the more disturbed we become.

Our world's wisdom considers God's ways dangerous - things like character, honesty, hard work, personal responsibility, marriage, family, teaching your children, not spending more than you earn, honoring public officials, serving your neighbor, identifying sinfulness and avoiding it, identifying righteousness and running to it, punishing evildoers and coming to the aid of victims, and obeying laws. These are all ethical and moral guidelines rooted in Scripture and only until we acknowledge and follow them will our society flourish.

GOD IS DUE ALL CREDIT

*Genesis 41:16, 25, 32 - Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; **God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.** The dreams of Pharaoh are one; **God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.** And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that **the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.**"*

Joseph was summoned before Pharaoh for the purpose of interpreting his dream. But Joseph made it clear that his ability was not because he was special. He stated even before hearing the dream that God was the source of any answers that would solve Pharaoh's need.

The dream was retold to Joseph and he immediately received the answer from God – seven years of bounty were on the way for the Egyptian economy, but famine was coming after that. The wisdom from God was laying out a plan to sustain the nation through a very difficult time on the horizon. Joseph also included wise counsel that Pharaoh needed to appoint someone to oversee and implement a program of storing a surplus to use against the lean time of famine to come.

Genesis 41:33, 34 - Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of

Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years.

GOD EXCELS AT SAVING

*Genesis 41:36 - That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, **so that the land may not perish through the famine.***

We know now that not only was God planning to save the land of Egypt, but was also laying the foundation for preserving the growing new "nation" of Israel, since Joseph's father and brothers would need saved during the famine as well. Later, Joseph makes this purpose clear:

*Genesis 45:7,8 - And God sent me before you **to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.** So it was not you who sent me here, but God.*

God is a saving God. Saving must take place because he is also a holy and just God who must judge sin. But in his grace, he doesn't leave us without help in times of trouble. From Joseph's example, we see that God delights to meet the needs of people who need his salvation so that he receives the glory.

Even though Joseph gave Pharaoh the answer he sought, he was careful to give God the glory for the plan he gave to save millions of people from starvation. It was quite a leap for Joseph after his long, depressing time in prison.

*Genesis 41:39, 40 - Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. **You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command.** Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you."*

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)

Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.

Room 153, House Office Building