

# Vindicated dreamer

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[0:00] Lovely. Good. Just get myself organised. Sorry. If you could keep your Bibles open to Genesis 40.

! Well, for those of you who were with us last week, if you recall, we considered how Joseph's faithfulness! And unwavering commitment to the Lord's faithfulness.

Unwavering commitment to God and a holy life led to him being unjustly treated by Potiphar's wife and his eventual imprisonment. Well, this week, what I would like to do is for us to pick up the narrative from his imprisonment and then look at his rise to a place of prominence. And I want to do this in very broad brushstrokes, given there's a lot of text there. I won't be kind of unpacking it in a kind of expository fashion. And I want to do that really under three kind of headings or three broad scenes. Firstly, God is with Joseph in prison. Secondly, God is sovereign over a world ruler and pagan empire. And thirdly, God exalts his servant, Joseph, to fulfil his plan. So they're going to be the three main points. So firstly, God is with Joseph in prison. The hymn writer, William Cowper, penned a very well-known hymn that I'm sure many of you here have sung and hold very dearly in your hearts. The hymn called God Moves in a Mysterious Way.

The words of the fourth verse of that hymn say, judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. For behind the frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. Now, I'm sure if that hymn was written during Joseph's time or in the kind of latter stages of his life, he probably would have been able to sing that with great heartfelt conviction. And those words would have meant something to him when we consider the work of God in Joseph's life. And tonight, when we approach this text, although Joseph, obviously, he's the main character here, I think it's always helpful when we look at a text to think, what does this tell us about God? What's this saying to us about who God is and how he works in people's lives? I think a good question to ask is, what's God doing here? What's he doing in Joseph's life?

Now, when I was studying this, I couldn't help but to think, there must have been times when Joseph was just crying out to God. That very question, what are you doing? And I think as we read this, I think it's helpful for us to think that as well. What is God doing through such seemingly random adversity and affliction for such a faithful servant? This is someone who loves God's law. This is someone who's serving God faithfully and he's facing such affliction. If we back up to chapter 39, the end of chapter 39 says that the Lord was with Joseph. He showed him steadfast love and he prospered him. But then if you read in Psalm 105, there's a kind of brief commentary in Psalm 105 on Joseph. Sorry, I can't remember which verse it is and I haven't noted it down. It says, when God summoned the famine on the land, bearing in mind God summoned the famine and broke the supply of bread, he had sent a man ahead of them,

[4:08] Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters. His neck was put in a collar of iron until what he had said came to pass. The word of the Lord tested him. So on one hand, God's showing Joseph this steadfast love. He's showing him favour and provision. But on the other hand, he's testing him. So we see how God's providence and his goodness at times, they appear to contradict each other, don't they? So here we see God honing and preparing his servant for usefulness. Joseph displays for us sterling character. We remember Ben's sermon when he was talking very much about that. We see qualities which can only be brought forth when one is under testing. We learn how the people of God function when their hopes are lost. In this passage, there's very much a sense that at one point, Joseph's hopes are dashed. There's great disappointment in his life. And how we can live. We look at this and we

think, how can we live in faithful obedience? Here we learn about Joseph's character and how he's being prepared for greatness in the kingdom of God. This narrative tells us what it looks like to live a life of holiness and faith while facing ongoing, persistent adversity. How do the people of God live in the midst of adversity and affliction? We've seen in Joseph's life how he's brought low, then he's kind of raised up, then he's brought low again. Sinclair Ferguson calls this the Jesus pattern. And he says this is the primary way that God shapes the character of his children so that they are fruitful. This sense of being brought low, then raised up. And we see that in so many of the biblical characters. Now in chapter 40, we see in Joseph's situation, he begins to very slowly take an upward turn when the cupbearer and baker enter the prison. Now it's important to note who the chief cupbearer and baker actually are. The baker isn't the equivalent of someone that just works in the local bakery.

There's nothing wrong in that, but he's someone different to that. The cupbearer isn't just a kind of low-level slave that's just tasting the king's, the pharaoh's food. These are high-standing officials. They're courtiers in the Egyptian government and they're of great significance. They're the pharaoh's, probably some of his closest officials. These men were in a place of great trust. They're in a place of great responsibility. And they're part of pharaoh's inner circle. So try and think of these men as very significant. In these times, tyrannical kings would have been paranoid about plots of assassination. We think of Nehemiah under King Cyrus as his cupbearer. This was something that was quite prevalent in those times in biblical history. And although we can't be sure that's what's going on here, it's likely that this is possibly the case. Joseph interprets their dreams perfectly, doesn't he? And he hopes, he has high hopes that the cupbearer will put in a word for his release. However, these hopes, they slowly diminish as the days, the months, and eventually two long disappointing years slip by. The Bible's honest about trials. It's very refreshing, actually. The Bible's very honest about suffering and the trials of God's people, faithful people. And that's a comfort to us as believers. We can almost feel Joseph's desperation, can't we, when he pleads for the cupbearer to remember him. He wants him to remember him. He wants to put a word in for him. And there's something about a man or a woman who trusts in their God. They remain human. They have real emotions.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you're kind of lifted out of a world of pain and difficulty. Joseph is no stoic, as we see later. You recall, if you know the story, when he's confronted with his brothers, he's weeping. He's an emotional man. God gives us the strength to trust him, not to take us out of these difficulties, but to trust him through these difficult emotions and the pain and the suffering that we experience. We see here how Joseph's character is being honed and put on display in a number of ways.

[9:08] I found it was just deeply challenging to read about Joseph, how he's not ruled by his circumstances. The circumstances reveal his character. He doesn't adopt a victim mentality. We hear that so much these days, don't we? He doesn't kind of lean on what happened to him when he was younger, how his brothers treated him. We see in verses six and seven, Joseph is a man of great compassion. He's sensitive to the emotional state of the prisoners. Now, when I'm feeling overwhelmed, when I'm struggling, my natural default is to want to withdraw. I'm less inclined to know what's going on for other people.

And if I'm honest, I'm less inclined to want to know what's going on for other people. I have this overwhelming sense that it's all too much, but we just see such sterling character in Joseph. This is a man in prison, going through what he's going through. He's got all the good reason in the world to withdraw, to be focused on his own needs. However, he's other focused. He's thinking about other people. He sees the needs around him. He doesn't succumb to the temptation that we can so easily succumb to, to withdraw. And isn't it interesting that God uses Joseph's compassion to set the wheels of his providence into motion? In verse four, we see the diligent use of gifts and the fact that Joseph has given responsibility. Joseph's using his gifts of administration. He's applying diligence. He's selfless. He's concerned to serve, even while in prison.

Joseph is an unusually gifted man. I think just reading this, you can see that this is a man that's endowed with extraordinary giftedness and with abilities. But do you notice Joseph's main priority is about serving? His priority isn't making it to the top. He's got a servant's heart.

Now, these gifts lead him to rise to the top wherever he is, don't they? But his priority is to serve God and to honour God. We see in verse 18, Joseph's an incredibly honest man. He tells truth. Now, it would have been easier for Joseph, when he's interpreting the baker's dream, to fudge the issues, to say, well, I'm not sure. It's a little bit vague. God's spoken to me, but I don't quite know the details. So we'll just leave that, you know. But he was able to be honest. He had the courage to give him very, very bad news, whatever the cost. It made me think about how this is applicable to us.

[12:14] When we speak to people about the gospel, the gospel's good news, isn't it? There's much joy, there's much good news in the gospel, there's no better good news. But that good news is within the context of some bad news. People kind of need to hear the bad news first before they get to the good news. And I wonder, are we able to be honest with people about issues like sin, like hell, uncomfortable? Can we be like Joseph? What about on a more personal level, people close to us, people dear to us, that might be moving in a direction that isn't great? We're concerned for them spiritually. Are we able to emulate Joseph in a way where we can be honest with them?

Might ruffle some feathers, there might be some cost. It's deeply, deeply challenging. In verse 8, we see how Joseph is a God-glorifying man. He glorifies God by stating, do not interpretations belong to God. We see here how Joseph is moving into being increasingly God-centered in his view of the world. Joseph's a very patient man.

It's helpful just to think about his life. He was 17 when he was taken to Egypt. I wonder, what was I doing when I was 17? He'd been away from his beloved father for 11 years, soon to be 13 years, if we can include the two years he's going to be in prison. So he's roughly around 28 years old. We're not entirely sure. But by the time he's elevated, he's going to have spent half his life pretty much in difficulty, imprisonment and affliction. That's probably more than I, longer than I've actually been a Christian. The chapter opens with some time after this, indicating a considerable period of time. So much of Joseph's life has been disappointment, waiting, same old affliction, waiting for God to do something.

These times of waiting for the believer, they're divinely appointed times. They're not outside the purview of God's providence. However, they are painful and at times frustrating, if we're honest. Now, is it not true that much of the Christian life is lived out waiting, frustrated hopes, unanswered questions, dealing with afflictions?

[15:02] Many Christians know this too well. Would love to have children, but it's not happening. They're waiting. Christians waiting for the children that they do have to be saved, to come to a saving faith in Christ.

It's not happening. What's God doing? They're waiting. Christians who are lonely would love to share their faith with a companion, a partner, would love a wife or a husband.

They're waiting. As a church, we were waiting, weren't we, in terms of a pastor, assistant pastor. We learn patience in privation, don't we?

Disappointment, affliction, the annoyances of life. These are essential to our spiritual growth. This cannot be developed when everything's going well.

I love life when it's going well. I love life when it's going well, but I won't grow if it's all going well. Nor will you. Joseph is learning what that old Puritan Jeremiah boroughs calls the rare jewel of Christian contentment.

[16:14] Philippians 4, 11. Paul says, You could imagine Joseph saying that, couldn't you?

Like Paul, Joseph is learning. In whatever situation he's in, he's to be content. Now, isn't this a difficult lesson for us to learn in our modern, comfortable lives?

We have everything at our fingertips. The lesson of patience. The lesson of contentment. Joseph's being molded. He's being tested. He's being proved by God.

We see at the end of chapter 40 that the chief cupbearer didn't remember Joseph. God's providence is seemingly confusing. Although Joseph is forgotten by the chief cupbearer, God

remembers his servant and remains faithful and full of steadfast love.

Is this not our story? How often can we feel forgotten by people or situations, but God remembers us. He remembers you, beloved.

[17:39] All the different threads of Joseph's life, such as ending up in the same prison as the cupbearer and the baker. It was the royal prison, which some believe Potiphar was the captain of the guard.

The forgetfulness of the butler for two years. The dreams being fulfilled with precision. Pharaoh's dreams occurring at just that right time.

They all come together to weave a tapestry of God's perfect plan. There are no accidents here.

Well, my second point is God is sovereign over a world leader and pagan empire.

We see in chapter 40 how God, he's working slowly in Joseph's life. Yet here in chapter 41, we see that although he's been working slowly, things start to move very, very quickly for Joseph.

There's a sudden acceleration in his life. The timing here is of utmost importance. Joseph's time was about to arrive. There was a moment in Joseph's life.

[18:41] He was being prepared for this special moment. Now, there are many significant moments in the Bible. And in our own lives, there are significant moments that are important that are God-ordained.

God's not panicked. He's not worried. He's God is man. He's God is time. Think of Jesus. What did Jesus repeatedly say? My time has not yet come.

Verse 32 says that the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God and God will shortly bring it about, signifying the absolute certainty of God's purpose.

Now, in Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, we see here how the one true living God exhorts himself over the false pagan deities.

God is displaying his power over the supposed power of Pharaoh, who would have been seen as a deity by the Egyptians, and over the nations. Now, the commentator John Currid argues that this story acts as a kind of polemic against Egyptian magical practices.

[19:51] And what he means by polemic, that's a very strong refutation of a point of view, or an ideology, or an opposing view. It's almost like an attack of a viewpoint.

So, where it says in chapter 40, Joseph asserts that the interpretation belongs to God. But if we look at verse 8, we see that the magicians, the wise men, they couldn't interpret the dream.

And yet, as the chapter unfolds, we see that God is constantly alluded to as the active agent, the one who has power over the false deities, over the magicians.

Now, this polemic flavor, we see it in other parts of the Bible. For example, in the times of Elijah on Mount Carmel, we all know that story, don't we?

How Elijah is taunting the prophets of Baal. Where is your God? Has he gone to sleep? I think at one point it says, has he gone to relieve himself? That kind of taunting polemic against the false gods.

[20:57] We also see it in Exodus, where God sends plagues over Egypt in a way that exalts God's power over the false deities.

We see here the majesty, the supremacy, and sovereignty of God, even over a despotic ruler's dream life. Isn't that remarkable?

Verse 2, where we see Pharaoh's dream... Sorry, I need some water. Where we see Pharaoh's having the dream of the cows coming out of the water, Currid comments that the Nile would have been of great importance to the ancient Egyptians.

They believed the land of Egypt was a gift given to them by the river. They believed the Nile was the primary source of the nation's existence. The God who was personified in the inundation of the Nile was called Hapi, H-A-P-I, not happy.

He was a God of fecundity and fertility, sustaining and providing for Egypt. The shock and urgency of these bizarre and disturbed dreams is expressed by the repetition of the word, behold, behold.

[22:21] So Pharaoh's pagan magicians are at a total loss. And we see here how the most powerful man, he's reduced to the place of utter horror, unease, dismay and fear by God.

As Proverbs 21 states, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hands of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will. Even someone as powerful as Pharaoh is not autonomous.

He's under the sovereign rule of God. He is at the mercy of a young Hebrew, a child of the one true living God. In verse 16, Joseph asserts, it's not in me, it's God who will give the Pharaoh a favorable answer.

Yet again, we see Joseph's sterling character, total commitment to God. And he has this God-centered worldview. He's governed by an immense view of God.

He's got this kind of sense of the all-encompassing decree of God. And you get a sense that Joseph doesn't struggle with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. So what does this mean for us?

[23:32] What's some of the application? Well, in our culture, we see various forms of New Age spirituality, don't we? That's quite prevalent in this city when you walk through the lanes. Similar to ancient paganism.

It's equally pathetic and false. Like the magicians, people seek to rely on astrology, crystals, tarot cards, you add to the list, to provide meaning to life.

However, such practices, they can't provide answers. Meaning and purpose can only belong to the Creator, Yahweh, the one true living God.

Verse 32 reminds us that we needn't be anxious as we see culture ever changing. It's easy to become anxious, isn't it, when you kind of look at the BBC News as a Christian.

We don't need to become anxious. We see the culture spiraling into darkness, futility, meaningless and confusion. The thing is fixed by our God.

[24:32] We have a God who is sovereign. We can have poise. We can have stability as we trust in his unchanging nature.

This trust doesn't lead to a type of inertia and we just think, okay, God's sovereign, we can just not do anything. But it leads to action like Joseph. It leads to service. It leads to commitment.

This God-centered worldview that we should be having and what Joseph had, it shapes everything around us. And how we view our lives and how we view reality.

Do we see that God is shaping human history for the good of his people, the church? I mean, look around. Look at us.

This little church. God is shaping human history for us, the church. My next point. God exalts his servants to fulfill his plan.

[25:28] We see Joseph rise to power in a radical way. We see here the most startling rags-to-riches story. But this is more.

This is so much more than a rags-to-riches story. We not only begin to see God's plan for Joseph, but we see his plan for the nations. There's a redemptive historical grand purpose here where we see the beginning of God orchestrating his plan of salvation and redemption through his exalted servant.

We see the beginnings of Israel's redemptive history as a family, which will culminate in their redemption as a nation from Egypt. And this all points to the coming of the promised Messiah. Joseph's gone from being a lowly, obscure slave in a mourning to the most powerful man in Egypt that very evening. He's been promoted from a prison to a palace.

In such a short space of time, from verse 33, we see that not only does he interpret Pharaoh's dream, but he has the wisdom and discernment to advise Pharaoh what to do.

[26:35] He directs him to put in place a national advisor. To appoint overseers. And this is one that probably wouldn't be too popular with us. Implement a 20% tax hike.

Well, it depends what your views are. And to build storage spaces. This is an extremely daring and bold political and economic program, isn't it?

When you actually think about it. He must have faced some resistance. So Joseph is elevated to the position of a kind of prime minister type figure, which according to the commentators is called the office of a vizier.

A vizier. The vizier is the grand steward of all of Egypt. And all the activities of the state are under his control. The vizier ran the state and apart from Pharaoh was the most powerful person in Egypt. We see here great homage and submission before Joseph. And in verse 41 and 43, we see this pageantry and him being invested to office.

[27:44] The chariot procession symbolizing status. The signet ring symbolizing royal authority. The golden necklace symbolizing honor.

The fine linen symbolizing wealth. This is an astounding turnaround for Joseph. He would have absolute power over the country.

Can you imagine? Now, just as an aside, I was thinking about this. It's okay at times for God's people to work in pagan environments.

The Bible mentions a few. There are a number of God's people who lived in those pagan settings. We think of Daniel under King Nebuchadnezzar. And then, was it Darius after Nebuchadnezzar? We think of Obadiah in Kings. In the court of King Ahab. Who was a pretty awful king. We think in the New Testament, there were believers in Caesar's household.

[28:48] Moses. It's okay sometimes. It takes some wisdom. Joseph was as faithful in Pharaoh's court as he was in prison.

You'd think initially, oh, it would be easier because life's pretty good. But actually, as we move up in life, I think it's easier to succumb to temptation.

I think it's easier to be corrupted by wealth, prestige, success. Other ideologies can creep in to water down your witness because you're in this position now.

We don't see that in Joseph, though. He continued to be blessed with abundance and success. That's signified in verse 49, where it talks about him having grain stored up like the sands of the sea.

We see in verse 51, Joseph commemorates God's provision in his life in the naming of his children in Hebrew.

[29:54] Interesting, he names them in Hebrew. Here we get a sense of Joseph's utter trust in God. He employs in the naming of his children the principle of that great Puritan that I love, John Flavel, principle that he writes of in the Mystery of Providence.

Providence is like Hebrew letters best read backwards. It's wonderful. He's reading providence through the lenses of God's sovereignty, provision, and goodness.

With the naming of his firstborn, Manasseh, he acknowledges how God heals wounds. And he has forgotten his hardships. Not in the sense that he's not cognizant of them anymore, but in the sense that he's now seen them as instruments of God's faithfulness and loving kindness and goodness in his life.

In naming Ephraim, he commemorates how he has been astoundingly fruitful in the midst of affliction. Now, he doesn't see the whole picture yet.

However, the naming of his sons is testimony that he understands that God can and does redeem the past. Just in terms of application, is that how we think about our pasts?

[31:14] We've all got different pasts. Some of us very troubled and damaged pasts. Do we see our pasts through the lens of God's providence, his goodness, his sovereignty, his loving kindness?

Well, from verse 54, we begin to see the utter devastation and the ravages of the famine, ravaging the land.

There's a repeated phrase where it says, all the land, all the land. Just hammering home, really, how catastrophic and cataclysmic this must have been. Helpful when we think of famine, not just to think of it as a distant thing that just happened then in that time in redemptive history.

Sometimes, put in your mind's eye when we see on the news how people are ravaged by famine, what that actually means. This would have been devastating. Yet, we see these words of such great hope and blessing in verse 55.

Go to Joseph. Go to Joseph. All the earth came to Egypt to see Joseph for provision. And here we see God's goodness and how Joseph, as an exalted servant, was to preserve God's people physically so they would be preserved spiritually.

[32:35] Does this not remind us of the spiritual famine and perishing we see all around us in our perishing world?

Does this not remind us of the one who is greater than Joseph? Who we all need to go to. Even if you're a believer here, you need to go to him. This points us to the one who fulfills all the promises. Joseph here provides us a picture of Christ. Go to Jesus. Now, unlike Joseph, Jesus is giving the bread of everlasting life away for free.

Isaiah 55 says, Come, everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. And he who has no money, come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Revelation 22, 17 says, The spirit and the bride say, come.

[33:38] And let the one who hears say, come. And let the one who is thirsty, come. Let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Have you come to Jesus?

If not, I urge you, go to Jesus. Let's pray.