

PM Genesis 40:1-23 Life of Joseph: Prison

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[0 : 00] We've come to another Sunday evening, we've come to another Sunday evening where we're continuing our studies in the life of Joseph. This evening we've come to Genesis chapter 40, Genesis chapter 40.

We see Joseph interpreting the dream of the two prisoners who he is also in prison with. But let's read together Genesis chapter 40 and we'll read the whole of the chapter together.

Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed a defense against their lord, the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

And he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

And one night they both dreamed, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, each his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled.

[1 : 04] So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, Why are your faces downcast today? They said to him, We have had dreams and there is no one to interpret them.

And Joseph said to them, Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me. So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches.

As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

Then Joseph said to him, This is his interpretation. The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly when you were his cupbearer.

Only remember me when it is well with you. And please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.

[2 : 10] When the chief cupbearer saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, I also had a dream. There were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh.

But the birds were eating it out of the baskets on my head. And Joseph answered and said, This is his interpretation. Three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you, and hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat the flesh from you.

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

But he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. Amen.

This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. As we turn to it now, let's turn to the Lord in prayer. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you this evening for your word.

[3 : 19] We thank you for the way that it speaks to us. We thank you for the message that it brings to us. A message that is the same down through the centuries. A message that remains unchanged. And we pray, Father, as we come to it now, we pray that you might speak to us.

We pray that you might go before us. We pray that the Holy Spirit might mightily minister amongst us. That he might open our eyes. That he might open our ears. That he might soften our hearts. That he might renew our minds. That we might see the wonderful truths of Scripture. That we might see how they apply to our lives. May you forgive us for our sin. And may you go before us now, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let's have that passage in Genesis 40 open in front of us. Genesis chapter 40. So that we can see what God is saying to us together through his word. Genesis chapter 40. We'll think about the whole of the chapter. [4 : 18] I have to say that coming up to session time is probably one of the most nervous times for me. Now it's not for the reasons that you might think. You know, generally, I'm not worried that I'm about to be sacked by the session.

Perhaps I should be more worried than I am. But generally, that's not what worries me. Generally, I'm not worried about what we're going to talk about. Even if there are controversial issues on the agenda.

Even if there are difficult issues on the agenda. I know that we can, as a session, I know that we can talk through them. I know that we can work through them together. But what really worries me is that the week before the session meeting is due to happen, Norman will send out an agenda. And on that agenda will be one item that strikes fear into my heart. It's entitled Minutes from the Last Meeting. It's then that I search through my emails quickly, trying to find the minutes from the last meeting.

Trying to find out what we agreed at the last meeting. Trying to find out what I was supposed to do from the last meeting. Because always there will be one thing that I've forgotten to do. Always there will be one thing that I haven't remembered to do.

[5 : 24] I start out with the best of intentions, of course. 99% of the things that we agree that I will do, I do. But there's always that one thing that slips through the net.

There's always that one thing that slips through the cracks. There's always that one thing that I've forgotten to do, even though I promised I would do it. And that's where we find the cupbearer in tonight's narrative, isn't it?

That's where we find the cupbearer in tonight's episode from the life of Joseph that we're considering. He promises to remember Joseph. He promises to mention Joseph to Pharaoh. But as soon as he's back in Pharaoh's palace, as soon as he's surrounded by the opulence of the palace, as soon as he's surrounded again by the comfort and ease of being one of Pharaoh's servants, Joseph goes out of his mind.

He starts out with the best of intentions. He starts out with the best of ideas. But he doesn't come through. He forgets Joseph and the promise he made.

[6 : 27] We want to see four things together this evening. Think about four things from this episode in the life of Joseph. Firstly, we want to think about dreams. We see that the chief cupbearer and the chief baker have these dreams, and we want to think about those dreams that they have.

Secondly then, we want to think about deliverance, that as we consider the message to the chief cupbearer, we see that it's a message of deliverance. We see that Joseph tells him, you will be restored, you will be brought back to your former office.

Thirdly, we want to think about death, that as we consider the message to the chief baker, we see that it's utterly different. We see that it's completely different from the message to the chief cupbearer. It's a message of death, not deliverance.

And then fourthly, we want to think about how the chief cupbearer dismisses Joseph from his mind. He forgets the promise that he's made.

Dreams, deliverance, death, dismiss. So firstly then, we want to think about the dreams, the dreams, and we see that in verses 1 through 8, verses 1 through 8 of Genesis chapter 40.

[7 : 33] Now, of course, as we do every time we come to Scripture, we think about and remember what we thought about last week. We remember where we are in the life story of Joseph. Last week, we saw Joseph being tempted by Potiphar's wife.

We saw that repeated refrain that Potiphar's wife brought to him, come and lie with me, come and know me. We saw him in prison, ultimately, because Potiphar's wife accused him of rape. But we remember verse 23 of chapter 39, that even in prison, the Lord prospered Joseph. Even in prison, the Lord looked after Joseph, and eventually, he rose to prominence. Eventually, he was put

in charge of the prison.

Eventually, the guard didn't worry about anything that was under Joseph's control, because he knew that Joseph would take care of it. So that's where we are as we come to verse 1 of chapter 40 then. Joseph is in prison, yes, but he's worked his way up through the ranks.

Joseph is in prison, yes, but in some senses, he's in charge of the prison. He's in a position of authority. He's in a position of responsibility. And it's some time after this then that the cupbearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, are sent to prison.

[8 : 45] Now, we don't know what this offense was. We don't know what great offense they committed against Pharaoh. We don't even know if it was the same offense. Did they commit the same events? Was it a joint enterprise, or did they just so happen to end up in prison at the same time together?

Was it something that they'd done together, or two offenses that just ended up in prison? However, whatever happened, Pharaoh becomes enraged with them. Pharaoh loses it with them and sends them to prison.

Now, notice that it just so happens he sends them to the prison that Joseph is confined in. He just so happens to send them to the same place where Joseph is. And we notice again the position of authority, the position of respect that Joseph is held in.

And we see verse 4, don't we? The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them. And he attended them. And they continued some time in custody.

So as these prisoners come in, now these are probably significant prisoners, you know, that they work for Pharaoh. And not only that, they're their chief cupbearers. They're the chief baker.

[9 : 51] These are significant prisoners. And as they come into prison, as they come into the pit, it's Joseph's job to look after them. It's Joseph's job to teach them the ropes. It's Joseph's job to make sure that they're settled, to make sure that they're safe in prison.

It's his job to get them used to the prison routines. It's a position of authority. It's a position of influence. It's a position, ultimately, of course, of respect. And now we get into the meat of the story in verse 5.

These two men are in prison. We don't know why. Joseph's looking after them. He's teaching them about prison life. And one night, we're told, one night they both dreamed. Notice it wasn't the same dream.

These men had a dream that was individual to them. Each of the men had a different dream, if you like. But they both had dreams on the same night. And the dreams are remarkably similar, kind of too similar to be coincidental.

This is God speaking to them. This is God directing them. This is God speaking to them through their dreams. Each man had its own dream.

[11 : 00] And each dream had its own interpretation. God was saying something different to each of the men through their dreams. God was saying something unique to each of the men through the dreams that they had. It wasn't a generic dream with a generic message.

It was a dream specific to them with a message specific to them. And that's one of the things that always amazes me about the Bible and about how God speaks to us today.

Of course, in some senses, the message is the same, isn't it? As we come to the Gospel, we read the story of the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's the same whoever you are.

But one of the things that amazes me about the Bible is that you'll come to a particular passage. It could be a passage you've read a thousand times. It could be a passage that you know inside out. But you come upon a particular passage in your quiet time for that day and God uses that passage to speak to you for that day. It's the same message that everyone else may read, but God uses it to speak powerfully to you.

[12 : 06] God the Holy Spirit opens our eyes. God the Holy Spirit does a powerful work in our hearts. And we see something new.

We see something fresh. We see something with renewed power and authority about the Word of God. It speaks to us individually. It speaks to us collectively.

Of course it does. That was one of the great principles of the Reformation, wasn't it? That each man should have a Bible in his own language. Why? So that he could read it for himself.

So that the Holy Spirit could do his ministry amongst men in their own language. But notice though, this wasn't a happy dream.

We all have that experience of having happy dreams, dreams that are full of joy. But we also have that experience of having dreams that are troubling. You know, those dreams that you wake up from drenched in sweat.

[13:01] Those dreams that you wake up from convinced that something terrible is about to happen. And that's what it was for these men. We see that verse 6. Joseph came to them in the morning. He saw that they were troubled.

It was a message that had unsettled them. It was a dream that had caused confusion amongst them. And he says, well look, what's wrong? Verse 7. What's wrong?

Verse 7. Why are your faces downcast? I remember there was an advert on the TV in Northern Ireland a few years ago about mental health.

And it showed a man out with his friends. It showed a man out laughing and joking. It showed a man who was the life and soul of the party. That was until he got home. And he took off his mask and he broke down and cried.

The idea being conveyed was that he could hide his emotions. He could hide how he was feeling. But these men don't do that here, do they? They don't hide how they're feeling.

[14:02] As Joseph sees them the next morning, as Joseph sees them the day after the dream, it's clear that they're troubled. It's clear that something's bothering them. And so Joseph says, well, what's up?

And I say, well look, we've had these dreams and we don't understand them. We've had these dreams and there's no one to interpret them for us. We've had these dreams and we don't know what's going on. And Joseph says, well, don't interpretations belong to God?

Verse 8. Tell it to me. Tell the dreams to me and I will interpret them for you by God's grace. Now notice the ordering of events here that God has brought about.

God has brought Joseph to Egypt. God has brought Joseph to Potiphar's house. God has brought Joseph to prison. God has brought these servants of Pharaoh to prison.

God has given these servants of Pharaoh dreams that they don't understand. God has placed Joseph in that same prison, in that position of power and authority also that his purposes might be advanced.

[15:14] God has brought Joseph is in prison at just the right time to use the gifts that God has given him to advance God's plan and God's purpose.

Of course, it's no accident, is it? God will often place us in a position to use our gifts. God will often place us in just the right position to use our gifts. perhaps one of the gifts that God has given us is an ability to care over and above what other people may have and God may place us as carers, as doctors, as nurses in hospitals.

Perhaps God gives us with an ability, gifts us with an ability to communicate with children and God may place us then as teachers, as nursery workers. God will place us in the areas where our gifts can be of greatest use to him and to his kingdom.

So that's the dreams then. The dreams that so troubled these men. Secondly then, this morning, this evening, we want to think about death. We want to think about deliverance, sorry, deliverance. And we see that in verses 9 through 15.

Verses 9 through 15, deliverance. So the cupbearer is up first then. Joseph said, verse 8, look, tell me the dreams, all interpretations belong to God, tell me the dreams and God will interpret them.

[16:33] So the cupbearer goes first. And he says, well look, in my dream there was this vine and on the vine were three branches and these three clusters, verse 10, soon ripened into grapes.

Pharaoh's cup was in my hand and so I did what I used to do. I took the grapes and I pressed them into Pharaoh's cup. I took the cup and I put it into Pharaoh's hand.

I kind of did the things that I used to do. I did the job that I used to do. And Joseph says, well, verse 12, here's what it means.

This is the interpretation. This is the understanding of the dream that you so saw. The three branches are three days and in three days Pharaoh will lift up your head. In three days Pharaoh will restore you to the position you once had.

You will once again put the cup into the hand of Pharaoh. You will once again do the job that you used to do. Now think about that. What's the message to the cup bearer?

[17:31] Here he is in prison. Here he is languishing in this pit. And what's the message to him? Essentially, it's a message of deliverance, isn't it? It's a message of freedom, isn't it?

It's a message of restoration to former glory. And that's what the gospel is for us this evening, friends. That's what the good news of Jesus Christ is for us this evening, friends.

It's a message of deliverance. It's a message of freedom. It's a message of restoration to former glory. It's a message of freedom from slavery to sin.

It's a message of restoration of right relationship with God, that glory that we lost in the fall of man into sin. It's a message of hope.

That's what the gospel is, friends. all of this is possible this evening only in Jesus Christ. It's not possible in any other way.

[18 : 38] It's not possible through any other human being. It's not possible through our own efforts and work. It's possible this evening only through Jesus Christ. And that's the message Joseph delivers to the chief cupbearer.

It's a message of deliverance. It's a message of restoration. But notice what he says verse 14. When all this is over, when you're restored to Pharaoh's office, when you're back doing your job, verse 14, remember me to Pharaoh.

Tell him about me. Tell him about the good things that I've done. Tell him that I'm here without cause. Tell him that I'm here for no good reason. Tell him that I've been brought out of the land of the Hebrews.

I was taken. I was stolen from there. And I've done nothing wrong in Egypt. Please tell him about me. I have a friend who works for a church and his name was always being spelt wrong on the church social media accounts.

It was a fairly simple name. It was a perfectly straightforward name to spell. But on the church social media accounts they had every variation of his name apart from the right one.

[19 : 54] And I was talking to him about it one day and he said you know it is a little bit frustrating. And I said to him next time I see it I promise I'll mention it to them.

Next time I see it I promise that I'll say something about it. And that's what Joseph says to the cup bearer here. Next time you see Pharaoh remember when you're restored.

Remember when you're putting the cup into his hand again. Remember please. To mention me to him. Remember to tell him about me. But that then got me thinking well why Pharaoh?

Why not Potiphar? I mean it was Potiphar against whom Joseph had allegedly sinned. It was Potiphar who'd put him in prison. So why does he mention Pharaoh? Well I think two reasons really. Firstly Joseph knows that his relationship with Potiphar is finished. He knows I think that there's no hope of restoration to that relationship and so he knows that Pharaoh's his best chance of getting out of there.

[20 : 53] And secondly I think Joseph also realises that Pharaoh's the real power. Pharaoh has the real authority here. Even if Potiphar wanted to keep him in prison but Pharaoh said that he should go free then there was nothing that Potiphar could do about it.

So that's the message of deliverance then. Three days you'll be restored. Three days you'll be back in your job again. But thirdly then we want to think about the message of death.

The message of death. And we see that in verses 16 through 19. The baker sees, the baker hears the interpretation for the chief cupbearer. He sees that it's favourable.

He sees that it's a good message. And so he thinks right well now it's my turn. Hopefully my message is going to be good as well. Hopefully my message is going to be one of deliverance as well.

Just as before he says there were three cake baskets on my head and the top baskets were all kinds of treat, all kinds of good things, all kinds of sweet pastries, all kinds of delicious things for Pharaoh to eat.

[21 : 57] But the birds of the air kept coming and eating it off my head. The birds of the air kept swooping down and taking all of those delicious things. The image in my head here that I have is of those women who you often see carrying huge jars of water on their head.

But to keep it all together perhaps the image then is of course would be of birds of the air coming and landing in those jars drinking all of the water.

That's where the two dreams are slightly different isn't it? That's where the two dreams are slightly at odds isn't it? Because in the first dream the cup bearer does what he's supposed to do. In the first dream the cup bearer squeezes the grapes and puts the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

In this second dream though notice that the baker doesn't do what he's supposed to do. He doesn't bring Pharaoh these sweet treats. He doesn't bring all of these kinds of good things to Pharaoh and even if he does make it to Pharaoh imagine what state these pastries will be in.

Imagine what state these baked goods will be in. Joseph interprets the dream again. He says look as before the three baskets stand for three days.

[23 : 09] In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head as well. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head as well as the chief cup bearers. But actually in three days Pharaoh is going to kill you.

In three days Pharaoh is going to hang you on a tree. And the birds of the air will eat your flesh from you. Two dreams.

But two very different interpretations. We saw how the message to the cup bearer was a message of deliverance. It was a message of restoration. It was a message of freedom. But the message to the baker is a message to death.

The Bible reminds us that the wages of sin is death. The Bible reminds us that we are all by nature sinners. that we are all by birth those who have fallen far short of the glory of God.

The Bible reminds us that by birth we deserve death. And yet the scene in Jesus was hanged on a tree.

[24 : 25] Notice here the baker's hanged on a tree but tonight Jesus has been hanged on a tree so that we might go free. so that we might experience deliverance.

So that we might experience restoration. So that we might experience hope. So that we might come to know God. There's no escape for the baker.

He couldn't get out of the situation he was in. But if we trust in Jesus Christ tonight, if we have faith in Jesus Christ tonight as the Savior, then there is deliverance, then there is hope for us this evening.

We know that he deserved the death that we deserve to die. We know that he died the death that we deserve to die. So that we might go free.

So that like the cupbearer, we can know deliverance. Fourthly, finally then, we want to think about dismissed. Dismissed.

[25 : 24] And we see that in verses 20 through 23. So these are the two dreams. chief cupbearer's dream leads to deliverance. The chief baker's dream leads to death.

But what will happen? Well, we find out three days later, verse 20, Pharaoh throws this party. It was his birthday. He throws a feast for all of his servants. And during this feast, he suddenly remembers about his cupbearer.

He suddenly remembers about the baker, perhaps having someone new there putting the cup into his hand. Perhaps having someone new there bringing him the baked goods makes him think, well, actually, what happened to those guys?

Where did those guys go? I like the chief cupbearer. I like the chief baker. And we're told that the cupbearer's restored to his position, verse 21. And just as Joseph interpreted, just as Joseph told him, he places the cup back into Pharaoh's hand again.

But also, just as Joseph interpreted, he also hangs the chief baker. And we may be tempted to think, well, how could he do that?

[26 : 56] How could he dismiss the one who had brought him such good news? How could he forget the one that had done such good things for him? And yet, friends, this evening, are we really any different?

How often are we tempted to do exactly the same thing? During a particularly difficult season in our lives, during a particularly stressful time in our lives, perhaps during a time of illness, perhaps during a time of uncertain employment status?

We're utterly dependent upon God. We're utterly dependent upon his word. We're utterly dependent upon prayer. We cast ourselves entirely on the mercy of God.

We're constantly in God's word. And yet, as soon as that storm has passed, suddenly we have no thought for God, really. Suddenly, quiet times become a snatched ten minutes at the end of the day, become a snatched five minutes when the kids aren't fighting.

Our passion and hunger for prayer diminishes. And we do exactly what the chief cupbearer does here. We forget God and all of the good things that he's done for us. We're like, to borrow a New Testament example, we're like those ten lepers who were healed by Jesus and are so slow to return and give thanks to God for all that he's done for us.

[28 : 18] As we finish this evening, friends, and as we close this evening, friends, let's remember all that God has done for us. Let's give thanks to the one this evening who offers deliverance to us through his son.

The one who frees us from death at the expense of his son. Let's not dismiss God from our mind.

Let's not dismiss God's goodness and care and providence from our mind.

but let's keep it front and centre for the rest of today, the rest of the week, and indeed the rest of our lives. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this evening for your goodness. We thank you for your care and for your providence. We thank you for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which indeed is a message of deliverance.

It's a message of hope. It's a message of restoration. We pray, Father, that we wouldn't be those who forget your goodness, who wouldn't go on our way without rejoicing and giving thanks to you for all that you've done.

[29 : 24] We pray that you may go before us into another week, a week which perhaps does have uncertainty, a week that does perhaps have difficulty in it. May we go safe in the knowledge of your care and your provision and your love for your people we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.