

God's Plan through His Servant

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[0 : 00] Well, let's get started. I'm guessing most of us have had plans and dreams for this year that have been shattered because of this virus.

For example, my wife and I had planned to take some long service leave next month and go and see her brother in Sweden. We had lined it up perfectly too, we thought. The kids are old enough to enjoy and remember the trip, so you get your money's worth that way.

It's the last year before my son starts VCE work, year 11 next year. We booked the early bird special and I worked through last Christmas saving holidays for this one.

We thought we had planned it perfectly, then this happened. Of course, we're not alone. I know others who have had to cancel big family holidays that they've been planning for a long time.

Or worse, couples who planned their wedding the Saturday after the lodge went from 100 people down to just five people. For one bride, her dream wedding was in tatters and at the rehearsal she was in tears.

[1 : 14] Or others whose family members passed away the week before the law changed from 100 just down to 10. And so it wasn't the celebration of life they wanted, nor even, I suspect, the closure they needed.

Or those whose weekly plans included human interaction and now they're suffering isolation. Well, as we return to Joseph in jail, it seems his plans and dreams have been shattered too.

I mean, being sold as a slave and ending up in prison is hardly the dream of a young 17-year-old boy, is it? What's more, last week we saw him forgotten by the cupbearer.

But we'll see today God had a plan all along. But it begins with some more dreams.

And not the plans and hopes sort of dreams, but the weird and wonderful sort of dreams. So we're at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. And I'm really hoping you had a chance to read the chapter during the week.

[2 : 22] Do your homework. Because at 57 verses, there's no way we're going to work our way all the way through it and look at each verse. Instead, I'll have to summarize. So in verses one to eight, it's been two years since the last chapter.

And Pharaoh has two dreams of seven. At first, a dream about seven plump, juicy cows coming up from the Nile River. Probably from the Nile because it was the source of Egypt's water for animals and crops, a source of life.

And then seven skinny cows came up, ugly. And they came up and ate the fat cows, like on the next slide. I'm sorry, the bottom right corner there is a bit graphic, I realize.

But I like eating a good steak as much as the next person. But this is a weird dream, right? No wonder Pharaoh woke up. But then in verse five, Pharaoh falls back asleep, doesn't he?

And he has a second dream, this time about seven healthy heads of grain being eaten by seven thin heads of grain, like on the next slide. Less graphic, this one.

[3 : 28] But verse eight, Pharaoh wakes up again troubled. In fact, last week, my wife had a weird dream. It was about the fact that we had another kid on the way.

I woke up troubled then. But that's not what the writer actually emphasizes in verse eight. Have a look at verse eight. In verse eight, he says, In the morning his mind, that is Pharaoh, was troubled. So he sent for all the magicians and all the wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dream, but no one could interpret them for him.

If you go to NIV, it's missing the second all there. But either way, the writer emphasizes Pharaoh trying to get all the possible people who might be able to interpret the dream, but no one can.

And in verses nine to 11, it's these uninterpretable dreams given by God that finally prompt the cupbearer, you know, Mr. Forgetful, to finally remember Joseph.

[4 : 33] And so Pharaoh in verse 14 sends for Joseph. He, Joseph, is given a shave and made presentable for the king. Then in verse 15, have a look at verse 15.

We read, Pharaoh said to Joseph, I had a dream and no one can interpret it. But I've heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.

Now, it's all about interpreting dreams here. But also notice we're again told that no one has been able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. In fact, when Pharaoh says to Joseph, look, I've heard you can, mate.

Look at what Joseph says in response in verse 16. He says, I cannot do it either. But God can. God can give Pharaoh the answer he desires. And in case we've still not got the point, we're told this a third time when Pharaoh repeats his dreams for Joseph.

[5 : 35] So in verse 17, Pharaoh repeats his dream about the cows. But this time he adds in verse 19, I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt.

I think they're pretty ugly. And then in verse 21, the end of verse 21, even after the skinny cows, he adds, ate the fat cows. No one could tell that they had done so.

In other words, they stayed skinny and looked just as ugly as before. These seven skinny cows obviously represent something seriously bad and ugly.

But then he repeats his dream about the heads of grain. And look at the end of verse 24. The end of verse 24. He says, I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.

You get the point? No human can interpret dreams about the future, can they? Rather, as we saw last week, interpretations belong to God.

[6 : 43] He alone can tell Pharaoh the meaning because he alone knows the future. In fact, God doesn't just know the future. He determines the future. And as we'll see, these dreams are God's plans for the future.

Now, it's still worth remembering this today in our world. We may not have magicians like Pharaoh that he relied on to interpret dreams and tell the future.

But we have all this new age stuff and astrology and so on. In fact, I came across an app for your phone or computer on the next slide called Predict Your Future.

And apparently it reads your palm with your iPhone or Android camera. And it can tell you when you'll get married, how many kids you'll have, and even when you'll die.

And if you just look at the top right hand of the app, it's got four stars. I mean, people are listening and liking this stuff.

[7 : 43] In fact, it was just one of over 240 different apps that you can get. Like this next one, which was released only this year in January.

That's why it's got a 2020 in the white and the red background in the top left corner there. Now, if you're at home scoffing and shaking your head, then good. Because this app, released only in January, couldn't even predict the coronavirus, could it?

You see, no human knows the future, not even Joseph, only God. But why doesn't God then just tell Pharaoh plainly what his plans are?

Why the dreams? Well, for one reason, because God chooses to reveal his plans through his servant. And that's what we see next with the interpretation.

So we're at point two, and come with me to verse 25. We'll pick it up at verse 25. Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, the dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same.

[8 : 52] God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. Do you notice that? These dreams are God's revelation of the future.

It says the same thing in verse 28. So have a look at verse 28. Joseph again says, It is just as I said to Pharaoh, God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do.

Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt. But then seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten.

And the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered because the famine that follows it will be so severe.

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms, cows and sheaves, is that the matter has been firmly decided by God. And God will do it soon.

[9 : 51] Again, we're told this is what God is about to do. It's his plan for the future. Seven plump cows and heads of grain are seven years of abundance.

You know, loads of beef and bread, steak sandwiches for everyone. But then will come seven ugly years of famine. And it will be so seriously severe.

Hence the ugliness of the cows. Yet notice God's plan is revealed here through his servant Joseph, isn't it? As we saw last week when Joseph spoke about the butler and baker's future, so too here. But this time it seems God has told Joseph why the dreams come in pairs. You see verse 32 again? Because God has firmly decided the matter and will do it soon.

Now I wonder how Joseph felt at this point. Because he had a pair of dreams too, didn't he? Where his family would bow to him as ruler over all.

[11:05] And so after 13 years, could it be that God will now soon fulfill Joseph's dreams too? Well, it seems Joseph, rather than thinking about that, is more concerned that people are now prepared in the present for God's future in their world.

After all, if you know the future, then is it not foolish to prepare for it in the present? Had we all known the future of 2020, I'm sure we would have all prepared differently for it, wouldn't we? Certainly our governments and our supermarkets would have prepared differently. And so in verses 33 to 36, Joseph tells Pharaoh to prepare by implementing a famine relief package for the nation. Joseph says to appoint a minister of agriculture, if you like, who can store up grain for the first seven years of plenty, so that there'll be relief in the following seven years of famine. Let's pick it up in verse 37. Verse 37. The plan about the famine relief package seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.

[12:23] So Pharaoh asked them, Can we find anyone like this man Joseph, one in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

You shall be in charge of my palace and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.

And notice here, by the way, that Pharaoh, even Pharaoh recognizes that it's God who made this known to Joseph. For Joseph is God's servant.

God's spirit rests on him, we are told. You see, God reveals his plans for the future through his chosen servant, Joseph.

And I wonder if this is already ringing some New Testament bells for you. A chosen servant on whom God's spirit rests, who reveals God's plans for our world today, and whose name also starts with J.

[13:34] Well, like last week, Joseph is proved to be God's servant, for the dreams are fulfilled, just as he said. So we're at point three now, and have a look at verse 41 in your Bibles.

Verse 41. So Pharaoh said to Joseph, I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger.

He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second in command, and people shouted before him, make way or literally bow down. Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Now, before we get to the fulfillment of Pharaoh's dreams, it seems here that Joseph's dreams will soon be fulfilled, because they are beginning to be here.

He's now dressed again in an expensive robe, and he's exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh over all of Egypt, such that in verse 43, as I pointed out, every knee will bow down at the name of Joseph.

[14:55] Now, does that sound like anyone else from our second reading? In fact, throughout this chapter, Joseph remains faithful to God like Jesus, and even gives God glory.

And so in verse 45, Pharaoh names Joseph with an Egyptian name, and Pharaoh gives Joseph an Egyptian wife. But the writer never uses his Egyptian name.

And down in verse 51, if you just scan down to verse 51, when Joseph can choose a name for his kids, he gives them Hebrew names, not Egyptian names.

And the names themselves actually acknowledge God. He gives glory to God, if you like. So he says in verse 51, God has made me forget all my trouble, and what has happened to me in my father's house, being sold as a slave.

And in verse 52, God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering. Here's Joseph giving glory to God the father, after being exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh.

[16:06] Again, it sounds an awful lot like Jesus from our second reading, doesn't it? But the point here is that Joseph's dreams begin to be fulfilled, but partially.

He's exalted as ruler over all, but his family has not yet bowed before him. And so this chapter is like the penultimate chapter, the semifinal before the grand final, when they soon will bow before him.

In the meantime, however, Pharaoh's dreams are fully fulfilled. There are seven years of huge abundance. In fact, in verse 49, there's so much grain, it's like the sand of the sea.

And then there's seven years of famine, just as Joseph said. So let's pick it up in verse 53. Verse 53. You see, Joseph is God's chosen servant, through whom God revealed his plans for the future of the world then, because they came true.

And through whom God also actually begins to fulfill his own promises. You see, this chapter is not just about fulfilling the dreams of Pharaoh, and it's not just even partially fulfilling the dreams of Joseph.

[17:50] Now, this chapter is really about fulfilling the promises of God. Now, remember God's promises on the next slide, you know, lob, land, offspring, blessing.

And as I showed you a couple of weeks ago on the next slide, from Genesis 12, God will bless Abraham. And notice, and all families on earth will be blessed through you, Abraham, through one of your descendants.

Well, Joseph is a descendant of Abraham. And over the last two weeks, we've seen God's blessing come through Joseph, you know, through Joseph to Potiphar, then through Joseph to the jailer, and now through Joseph to all the families of the earth.

Because we read in our last two verses, verse 56, 57, have a look there. When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt.

And all the earth, literally, came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

[19:05] Here's the connection. All the earth is finding food through Joseph. In other words, they are being blessed by God through Abraham's descendant.

This is God's promise beginning to be fulfilled. But this chapter is also a picture of God's future plans to bless, not just the known world now, but our whole world today, through his great servant, Jesus.

And like a picture points us to the real place, so this picture points us to that plan and that servant. I mean, we've heard about it from a shell through the kids talk, and I've tried to make the connection between Joseph and David, Jesus so clear that hopefully it seems obvious to you now, but that's what this chapter is about.

It's pointing us to God's bigger plan to bless through his greatest servant, Jesus. For Jesus reveals God future plans for our world, which they're not about seven years of plenty and seven years of famine.

No, they're about a day when the whole earth will be called to account, and some will receive eternal years of plenty in a new creation, but some will receive eternal years of judgment in hell, where they'll continue to reject God.

[20:37] And yet, like Joseph, Jesus also suffered in order to save people from that eternal years of famine, for those eternal years of plenty, to enjoy the blessing of life in all its abundance in the new creation.

But to save people from eternal famine, Jesus didn't just suffer the sins of his brothers who betrayed him, an adulterous woman who condemned him, or a cup bearer who forgot him.

No, no, Jesus suffered the sins of the whole world upon him, yours and mine. And Jesus wasn't raised out of the pit of a prison, exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh over all Egypt.

No, Jesus was raised from the pit of a tomb, and exalted to the right hand of God over all the universe. And now he is pouring out God's blessing on all the families of the earth, saving all from that eternal famine to come, all who believe in him.

And so, on the next slide, God, given God has revealed his future plans through his servant, Joseph, Joseph, will you prepare for it?

[21:56] Not by storing grain, but by trusting in Christ. You see, if we had known the future of 2020, we would have prepared for it.

How much more so, now that we do know the eternal future of our world. And so, do you trust in Jesus, who saves us from eternal famine, for eternal plenty?

If you don't, or are not sure, then please email us, we'd love to help. And for us who do, then, do God's future plans for our world, shape our present lives in the world?

Whether it's by speaking of God's plans to others, as we have opportunity, and praying for them to be saved. I was speaking to an elderly man from our church this week, who had a fall.

He's okay, but when I asked how I could pray for him, whether I could pray for his health, he said, oh no, just pray for the people of the world instead.

[23 : 00] That this time of virus would turn them to Christ. Or another person from our church, whose brother is dying from cancer at the moment. As she asked us to pray, not for his health, but for his salvation, because he's not yet a Christian.

And now we can pray for everything, absolutely. But the point is, here are people whose present lives are shaped by God's future plans, revealed through servant Jesus.

Or do we take time to grow ourselves and our families in godliness? So that on the last day, we'll be prepared, if you like.

See, God will bless us by making us fully like his greatest servant, Jesus. And so growing in godliness is a way of preparing for our eternity.

More than ever, people are out riding bikes in the streets and walking in the parks. And people have been telling me that Ruffy Lake Park is packed and Westerfolds and the like. And it's terrific. It's great to see people out and about as a family getting exercise.

[24 : 09] But do we also use this time to train, not just for our physical health, but look after our spiritual health? As we read on the next slide, for physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise both for the present life and notice and the life to come.

And so I know some of us have been using this extra time to read Christian books that help us to grow in godliness. I know another family who is using this time as an opportunity to reestablish healthy habit of family devotions with the kids a few nights a week.

And yet another family is persevering and encouraging their kids to attend kids church on Sunday mornings and youth group online on Friday nights, even when the kids aren't really keen to go.

Here are people whose present lives are shaped by God's future plans, revealed through his servant Christ. But of course, until that day when God's plans and promises are fully fulfilled, life is not always easy, is it?

We may suffer temptation or unjust persecution like Joseph did from Potiphar's wife, or we may sometimes be forgotten by others as Joseph was by the cupbearer.

[25 : 36] Or we may have suffered loss, you know, like the loss of our plans for this year, or worse, the loss of income or our health or even a loved one.

And when it's hard, then remember. Remember, like Joseph, God will exalt us to glory too. As Paul puts it on the next slide, Now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs, co-inheritors with Christ.

If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that, we may also, notice, share in his glory. For I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

For that elderly man I mentioned who had the fall, life is not easy. He has lost his wife and misses her dreadfully. He sometimes feels lonely, especially these days.

And his health is deteriorating. In fact, when I asked him what caused the fall, he said, decrepitude, Andrew. But as I was speaking to him, he remembers glory, an unimaginable glory with Christ, where he will see his wife again and enjoy an abundance of plenty.

[27 : 01] Remembering this helps him persevere, even joyfully. Here is another person whose present life is shaped by God's future plans, revealed through servant Christ.

I don't know what God's plans are for our future this year, but we all do know God's plans for our future in eternity, don't we?

So let us then let God's future plans shape our present lives. Let's pray they would. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder that you have a plan for the future of our world and that you've revealed it through your servant Christ.

Help us, therefore, we pray, to let these future plans of yours shape our present lives. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.